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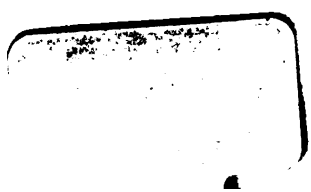

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ROSA AMOROSA

THE LOVE-LETTERS OF A WOMAN

BY

GEORGE EGERTON [pseud]

NEW YORK: BRENTANO'S
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DEDICATED

TO

ALL TRUE LOVERS AND *ONE*

EXPLANATORY NOTE

It has been suggested to me that owing to the appearance of another book of love-letters, I should volunteer some explanation as to these of mine.

Arrangements for their publication were concluded early in last year, and most of the letters were obviously written before the announcement even of any other book of love-letters was made. Personally, I cannot see any probability of comparison, as I have heard from competent judges that the other book belongs to the region of exquisite literature; this pretends to be no more than the veracious expression of the thoughts and love of one little woman, of value only as truthfully human.

Roll No. 2, 1, 4, 9, 10, 12, 14.
15, 16, 18, 20.
Page 1-20.

INTRODUCTORY

In giving these letters to the buyers of books I am not violating any confidence, or failing in any trust to the little soul who wrote them. Indeed, it is perhaps the recollection of a speech of her own which first suggested the giving of them, in all their tender intimacy, to a greater number of readers. She was sitting on a low stool staring into the fire with her "speering" seer eyes; we were discussing the good taste of a newly edited volume of love-letters. "Personally," she said gravely, "I should not mind if I had a crystal disc in my forehead, so that all I have ever thought might be seen through it, a *camera lucida* for all men. Of course"—I recall the whimsicality of her mouth with a pang of regret—"I do not hold myself accountable for unconscious cerebration, or any of the subconscious vagaries of the trolls of my fancy who wanton in there—I lay the whole responsibility

thereof humbly at the door of the great first cause."

She had been writing on a pad on her knees, and I said: "You would not like those letters you write to fall into other hands than his?" I can see again the ripple of tenderness, as the dancing shadow of aspen leaves in a sunlit brook, tremble over her face. "I don't know! Yes, given certain conditions, I don't think I should mind. The only thing in the world of moment to me is something in myself, something beyond and above all criticism. If anything I have written in them to gladden, to inspirit one morbidly inclined mind, to kindle an unquenchable beacon light in the gloom of one soul which I found in darkness, could give others a tithe of the same faith in love's joy and power for good and gladness, it would be a good thing. Besides, you want love here.

"You are all so serious in England, so desperately in earnest! You have missions for the working of all kinds of spells for the ensnarement of gladness. All your jam holds a concealed powder, so that one looks with distrust at the offer of any sweetness. Poor Lady Joyance, she can never trip it debonnairly, for

the dour face of the Puritan lurks at every merry-making, ready to drive the dancers to the door with thwacks of a wooden stave and whispers of propriety. You are always playing Blindman's Buff in search of morality, and sinning against decency in your stumbles to catch her. If your moral conscience as a nation were not always in the way of your intellectual conscience, a *true* transcript of your manners would oust the French novel from the shelves of the collector of *contes salés*. Your novels are not readable, because they are written with an eye to a bookstall-monopolist's censorship, whilst the materials for a modern 'Tom Jones' or 'Roderic Random,' chronicles of the flesh and blood of to-day, are lost to posterity; and a faithful picture of the life of our time will be better gleaned from the files of the divorce and police reports and the maunderings of the ladies' papers than from the pages of contemporary fiction!

"I have only found two things of vital importance—love and laughter. They are the cardinal virtues, all the others follow. As loving was the first, so it is the last of the fine arts—aristocratic from instinct. The true lover is born

an expert, and needs no apprenticeship. The philanderer may improve by practice; the amorist is at best but a hybrid lover, always chasing the *san grail* of true love and fidelity, and getting entangled on the way in the mesh of his senses. Love is religion. But you have so many forms of belief that one has to confess oneself a heretic to escape being torn to pieces in the interest of some special form of the True Faith. One has to step outside the pale of orthodoxy in order to find a quiet fane where one can commune with one's God at the altar of one's own form of worship. Love—Love is the keystone of the human bridge spanning time and eternity, and the waters of life flow under it, and it ripples with wavelets of laughter and whispers of joy, or rushes sullenly and murkily, just as the heart-beats of the pilgrims who cross it time their feet to a measure of mirth or sadness.

"Love is the Master Art, the ever incommensurable, the all-conquering!—the iconoclast who laughs at all social distinctions—stronger than death, for death can but slay one soul, love may destroy two. It steals upon you unawares, and lo! you are a captive for evermore—a will-

ing slave bartering your liberty with a lilt on your lips—aye, risking damnation for possession, for your true lover will sign his name with a smile to any 'bill of adventure' when the ship is bound for 'the magic ocean.'"

I wish I could give the quivering flashes of light and shadow in her eyes, the swift play of lips and brows. We who loved her always expected great things of her, and she used to laugh and say with the flashing smile that was a caress to those it met: "Genius, I? No, I have a pretty talent for loving, that is all!" I scarcely knew if she was beautiful, one was only conscious of the soul and spirit of her, she was like a white flame in a lamp of opal. Sometimes I missed her for months, aye, years, and then she would flutter back to my embrace and my fireside, as a tired white moth with its wings sore beaten by storm gusts.

I never asked her any questions—"Heart o' Gold" was back, that was enough, and then the white flame would leap and illumine places that had grown dark in her absence—I was always the richer by her coming. She was a witch of a woman, with sudden tenderness and a rare vitality, a subtle magnetism in her wile-weaving

body. Her voice was full of tender inflection, but could cut keen as a scimitar when influenced by disdain or scorn. Restless herself as the spirit of wind or wave, there was always a sense of restfulness in her nearness; she had the divine gift of perfect understanding. She had no doubts; life was always an open book to her, each day the ribbon to mark a fresh page for perusal, and on every page of it adventure. She had the frank paganism of a healthy child-nature, and she looked at everything with the direct undaunted gaze of a fearless child. "I am not in the least extraordinary," she often said; "the only difference is that I dare to be entirely natural. My so-called subtleties are all simplicities." Things were natural or unnatural, true or untrue; the latter was the only sin. She had a fine contempt for mere reason. "Instinct," she used to say, "is a finer quality." I can see her eyes, as I write; they repelled at a first meeting, I can recall how they pierced me through as two electric needles of surprising keenness, so that I felt pinned to the wall, whilst the spirit behind them searched me through and through and then let me go, enveloping me in a gaze that warmed and enthralled me. I wish

I could recall her many sayings, her definitions of love and its value.

"To me the gift of loving is the greatest thing I own. The fountain of life—in my house of life; the sweetest smelling rose in the garden of my soul; the white light burning in the sanctuary of my senses; the inner whisper of music intoning harmonies.

"A genius for loving is beyond all price, is beyond all dreams, all talents, all capabilities; a fountain of Jouvence, out of which the spirit rises in perennial youth, a precious euphrasy to give one the child-gaze into life and the things of living. This finer eroticism is as far removed from mere sensual gratification as the lily flower from the compost the gardener lays to its roots. To know of a well-spring of love in oneself is to be rich for all time. The true lover must ever have some quality of greatness, must risk all with no huckster eye to profit and loss, dare all and everything; must give unceasingly, unsparingly, unheedingly, prodigal of tenderness, a very spendthrift of caressing whimsies. I hate a barterer in the things of love—a love-monger. One can go bankrupt in love as in all businesses—if one makes a

trade of it. Why be afraid? I believe in giving—the more one gives the more room one makes for the storing of new emotions. Love is the only factor which can negative the materialism which threatens to swamp all human efforts towards spiritual advancement. Hitherto *man* has been the master lover; the chronicles of woman's love have been but tales of sacrifice. But I say to you, George, and to all women—you have that in you, if you are not afraid (now when man has, not seldom too generously, opened the portals of life for you) that which can regenerate the world through love again! I say, not afraid. One is never really free until one has got right inside oneself, ready to explore the dark crannies in one's soul and own up to the *cul de sac*; until one can turn round and round like a dog on a mat taking comfort in one's detachment, for so one can dream best, and what is more important, love best! Man can teach you nothing of love or the things of love, if you listen to the intuitive whispers in your own woman's soul—you have all the mysteries there, *his* and *your own!* But remember—and it is that you are in danger of forgetting—the more absolutely unlike you

remain to him, the greater your power! You have competed now in all the academies, stormed most of the closed doors of male enterprise, held your own in all the callings of life—the one thing you *haven't done* is learned to *love better*, and when all is said and done, cry as you may against it, Love is the one thing needful for you. Not so much how you are loved or who loves you, but how you yourself love and whom you love."

Her letters give a year of her own life and the part her love played in it. I have only excluded a sentence here and there where names were mentioned, and matters treated of a purely private nature, and her own words must be my excuse for publishing them.

GEORGE EGERTON.

I

KIEL, RAILWAY STATION, 5.30 A.M.

MY OWN DEAR LOVE, MY DARLING BOY,—Arrived at 5 o'clock and came straight here from the steamer; we had a very quiet crossing from Kursö. It is absolutely quiet, the waiting-room is deserted; the waiter found me a piece of paper, and I feel I must send you a line. I am only now realising fully what absence from you will mean. How difficult it is to take every step which leads me farther from you, how heavily my heart lags behind whilst my will forces me on. I am one aching wish to be back with you; I cannot forget your face, your white, strained face, and the misery in your dear eyes. Yet it is perhaps harder for you than for me, and God knows it is hard enough for me—but it is in your nature to mistrust happiness, to expect hard buffets from fate; I

am more sanguine, not alone that I am more sure of myself; but I am more dogged at opposition, more ready to come to handigrips with adversity and fight inch by inch for the object I have in view, to dare fate down me.

My poor love, my heart's own! how can I make you realise that I am with you every minute of existence, that I am now really one with you? I have kept my watch at your time, I know what you are doing, I went to you last night at the hour I knew you would try to sleep, I felt how you stretched out your arms, how you called on me and how you suffered at the silence and the void. Believe me, I am near you, never away from you—never again.

Remember I told you that in case of any urgent need I would go to you and you should come to me. You are now an integral part of my life. Everything I see strikes me in a new way because I find myself thinking in what way you would see it, how it would affect you. That was my first thought as I sat here sipping my coffee. I remembered how you said that the dislike of all other nations of Germany was based on an *instinctive* fear, not a rational one, therefore well founded. I think you are right.

This extraordinary station is an admirable place to realise why. It might serve as a keynote to the understanding of this growing nation. It is not that it is colossal ; we have tremendous railway stations in London, but nothing like this. Ours are merely great erections to facilitate the beginning and ending of journeys. This impresses one differently somehow. It is a concrete embodiment of modern Germany, it gives one an idea of order, of military discipline; more than that, of a national idea or ideal. The very spirit of the nation cements the stone and marble. The architect kept the glorification of his country in view, its spirit of expansion the pan-Germanic idea. I fancy nationality is a *faith* with these people more than an *idea*, and the head of the state is helpful, because he is perhaps the only crowned head left who really believes he is God-anointed.

A year ago I should never have had any such thoughts : you see how it is with me. From this out life will be a journey by easy stages to end in meeting—the rounding of a circle beginning and ending with ourselves. If the circumstances of your life admitted of our union now, it would be a great temptation to follow the impulse of

my heart and stay with you—but you and I both know, that even if it could be, the course we have agreed upon is best for us both—best, taking the peculiarities of our temperaments into consideration. I am an independent wayward thing in all my outward moods, if the fundamental chord in my inner self is always tuned to the one key. Yours is a difficult nature to fathom. You have a wounded place in you that even the woman who loves you must learn to treat tenderly. It is entirely well for our future happiness that we should learn to know one another better through our letter life until we meet again. You will grow in confidence to yourself and me! I know, dear, I know that your faith and trust in me are unbounded, but I know also that you would doubt in time, because with you everything must filter in slowly, become part of yourself, your egoistic ego as it were, before you really accept it. When I prove to you as the months tell their tale that my face will be ever turned to you, that where you are is my heart home, that you own me, every fibre of my body, every stir of my senses, every throb of my heart, then, and then only will you be completely

satisfied. I too must be sure of myself, sure that when removed from the physical influence, the personal magnetism you exercise over me and which makes me a bondswoman to my wish to be loved by you, that I shall still desire to be bondswoman, but of my own will, at my own election in obedience to a necessity (I say advisedly necessity) of my whole nature; thus yours, and yours only.

Keep a brave heart, trust me, believe in me and above all love me. Think when you read this that I put my arms round your neck, that I look into your eyes as I used to do, that I let all the gladness, the content, the delight in feeling myself yours creep into them again, that I bend to give you my mouth and say my dear, dear love I am all your very own; every inch of my body, every secret cranny of the soul of me. I go from you only in order to get nearer to you, I am yours in absence, as loyally as if I were never out of the reach of your staying hand, my soul shall be as a mirror in which you can see yourself reflected at all hours of the day and night, my will a lever to lift aside every barrier between us and the truer understanding of ourselves. Whatever is of brightness, of

good or hopeful in me, I shall try to let you feel through my written words to you. I will give you the sight of my eyes, in as far as I can with mere words limn what I see on paper; I will try to prison my random thoughts so that you may note the workings of my mind; I will actualise the dream in my woman's soul, hark to the stirring in my senses, listen to the whispers in my heart and send them all to you, that you may learn to know the spirit in me as you have learned to love the body of me. Do you remember that evening I sat on your lap like a docile child and we read together? I always reached the end of the page first and held it ready to turn over, whilst my eyes watched your face, partly because I liked to, partly that I might see when you would reach the last word. Sometimes I kissed you, always when you looked at me before you went on to the new page.

It shall be like that, dear heart, with our letters; I will make myself an open book for your perusal. Everything I have noticed on the way has appealed to me in a new way, no longer in relation to myself alone but always to you also. The clock tells me I

must stop, but I shall be with you all the way. I am anxious to get to my journey's end, for I shall find your letters waiting for me—I have only one tiny scrap of writing from you as yet. Good-bye for a little while, my heart's desire, my dear, dear one, take me to you; you didn't know you hurt me a little when you crushed me to you in your distress at losing me, I felt it for hours afterwards, but would not have had it otherwise. Keep glad, hopeful, wait with perfect trust. Say to yourself if you despond—She is mine, mine, all mine, I must not doubt her word—if you listen I am sure you will hear my voice somewhere in your own soul echoing—I love you, love you, love you.

Always your R.A.

II

My Own, my very, very Own,—You joy-bringer! You maker of spring in my heart! I am so glad to-day that I feel all the world is good and it is well with life, and the whole of me is a *Te Deum*. I laugh, and I know not why I am laughing; my lips form a prayer half unconsciously. How we love God when we are happy! Spring is whispering, whispering insidiously, secrets of kinship to the generative principle in the earth, the air, the beast and bird, and all things in this good glad world! There is an answering spring in my feet, that makes walking a tripping measure to the rhythm of a mystic melody in the senses of me.

I wish I could send you the breath of the year's time, for you are still in winter. I have put on a new gown, the colour you like, and I have found enough violets to make a posy for my breast; I wish you could see me, that I could

pop up, as I often did, suddenly beside you, slipping my hand through your arm, watching to see the welcome fill your eyes. Such moments are worth a hundred pre-arranged meetings. A blackbird is calling from a copse, "Won't you wait a bit, wait a bit!"—tiresome, reiterative thing to whisper of waiting, when my soul is a tip-toe with impatience, when the young impulsive spring is calling in my blood and the whole of Nature is chanting litanies of life and loving. When overhead there is a flip, flip of whirring, thrumming wings, peculiar to birds as they kiss on the wing in courting time.

It is an exquisite world, for the cold kept some of the early blossoms back; and now, in response to the sudden more ardent call, they are flowering extravagantly, as if in apology for their timorousness. Tardy, flushing almond-flowers, all ashamed of appearing with the forward cherry! An exquisite, exquisite dainty world of dripping cherry-blooms, and delicate perfume and amorous birds. Why am I not with you? What a waste of love, of life, of happiness! For why? Tell the truth, soul of mine! Because we were afraid to risk, risk, risk! But it is coming nearer,

nearer, and when the spring calls up there with you, and the young summer has chastened his audacious freshness with us, you will call and I will go!

How good that you have got through that tiresome examination—the last real obstacle between us! How the birds call! I envy them because they are happier than I am! I have not seen the world with just the same eyes as to-day for more than a decade of years. Have you not noticed that when we were children we saw everything more as a whole? The entire picture struck our senses, and all our senses vividly, and more than was in the picture, too —the parable behind it. As we grow older we lose the clean lines, we stipple at our pictures, see details, are for ever making comparisons. We see less as artists, more as journalists; for all children have the eyesight of great painters, and not a little the fancy of true poets. They see at one glance the essentials; I can recall pictures, whole galleries of completely rounded impressions. There was no yesterday and no to-morrow! One was oneself, one open-eyed wonder at the splendid present!

I can remember a spring day in an old garden,

and I can taste again a piece of apple-cake the cook gave me when I asked her for the key to enter it. I can recollect quite well keeping back one delectable morsel of apple "for the last," and breaking off the crispy, scrumpy bits, browned in the baking around the edge, so as not to lose any when biting into it. I could not see a garden in the same way to-day, could not get that complete, perfect impression of a wondrously beautiful whole, a tender green delight, speaking to every sense and whispering of God's wonder. The tiny primulas—now I should think the colours ugly—were a marvel, as they thrust their pinkish-lilac flower above the brown earth; every snowdrop gave an idea of purity, and the moss on the gnarled trunk of the old peach-apple tree was more marvellous than velvet; I always fancied the fairies and flower elves had the entrance to their own kingdom through the mystic openings in its bole. There was a gorgeous bed of stately tulips, too; they reminded me of the wives of the Doges of Venice; and rows of waxen hyacinths. I disliked their perfume intensely. I have loathed all my life "thick" sweet odours, liking the "thin" scents best; indeed, I am never in sym-

pathy with a man or woman who confesses to a partiality for tuberose or magnolia; I generally discover a spiritual antagonism.

I can recall every tree in that old garden, every bush where the different birds—unvarying yearly tenants, with an undisturbed tenure—fashioned their nests. I can remember, too, the same town on a wet night. The glistening streets, the dim shining lights in the old-fashioned hanging lamps, the soft fresh coolness on one's cheeks, the rhythm of the water, plashing and trickling on the gutters; above all, the young glad feeling of being alive—ay, that it was good, just good, to be alive, and wet days were part of the splendid game! I could see in one glance the whole of the street, the physiognomy of the houses, the character, as it were, of the hall doors, the angles made by the cross streets, the new toys (it was Christmas week) in the windows; glimpses of interiors which struck me as whimsically described scenes out of Dickens. I *could read* him then. An old cobbler laughing, with hammer poised, at a little girl with round eyes and a golden mop tangling out under a ragged crochet hood. She had been crying, and he had stuck her Dutch doll in a

lump of cobbler's wax on the bench. I can see it now, with its legs stuck airily in the air and its wooden head askew, wileing the small woman of woe to smiles.

The best gift God can give a man is the faculty of seeing with a child's eyes and feeling with a child's heart through all the days of his natural life. The right version of "those whom the gods love die young" never meant that they were cut off in the flower of youth, but that they keep it intact through all the years of life, to die still young when the tale of the years registers them amongst the aged! Sometimes now when I go to a strange place, and have thrown aside all thoughts of every one and the responsibilities that come with human ties, I can get a sharp, clear, whole impression of a fresh scene; can throw myself into the hour, and meet people with the same unquestioning trust as in the old good days! but alas! always more and more rarely.

You had the same faculty as a child, but you were always, I fancy, more eager for companionship, less single-souled than I was. I can remember how you told me of evenings when you used to sit in the inner room by the oven on a little

birch-bark chair, and watch your father and mother, and ponder on the meaning of your parents' lives. I can see him quite plainly from your description, through the door of the other room, playing cards with his chums. I can see the doctor with the silk skull-cap, and fringed stock and the purple nose; and the schoolmaster who had asthma and wheezed like a leaky bellows; and the big red-faced district magistrate who wore a peaked fur cap and Jack boots greased with tallow. I can see the brass lamp, and the old green bottles with the plated neck-rims and the hissing Samovar. I can smell (that I am certain you never could) the very foreign smell of it all; we haven't that smell over here. And near you in the inner room with the ikon in the corner, glowing gold and red and blue in the half-gloom, the waxen St. Catherine, with the austere, pallid face that always reminded you of your mother.

And your mother: I can feel with you again the aching desire of your poor little starving child-heart to creep to her, and curl like a chill puppy on the carpet of her gown, nestle to her feet. That all-seeing, all-wise child instinct, which makes childhood with its pains

and disillusions, and searing slights and fierce resentments so keen a period of suffering. I can fathom the acute sensitiveness which made you keep aloof and watch her yearningly, I can see her look up from her knitting, from the book on the table next her, look in at your father and his companions, draw her lips tighter and half turn her chair as if to shut them out; hear her low, concentrated, impatient "Get a book or your soldiers, child, you have a hateful habit of staring!" I can feel your little heart contract and curl round like a leaf withering before the touch of autumn blasts. And I want, want to uncurl it—isn't that what I have been trying to do for the last year? Want to lay it on my palm and breathe warmly, steadily on it. It is the little things, the common every-day things which steal in and make us all curd soft.

I remember I once said to you, speaking of myself casting "toss balls" in green, green Irish fields: "You were perhaps pegging tops or playing some extraordinary game with a terrible, unpronounceable name!" and you replied simply: "I never played, I read newspapers, and they only told of famine and riots and Imperial ukases, each one fathering a peasant's

curse." You were so surprised because the tears came and because I kissed your eyes and cheeks and mouth with sudden fervour, and rocked you in my arms with a rush of tenderness. Well, I am glad I spent much time in play. I can smell the toss balls, "sweet balls," again; can see the meadows with the canal, more like a gracious river just there, running swiftly through the flower-decked banks. It had a bragging Irish brogue, that canal, and told all sorts of tales of the building of grand locks and bridges and barges and doings in Dublin.

You don't know what "toss balls" are. You pick cowslips; I cannot find them in your dictionary, but in Norsk they call them "Mary's key-strings." It is singular how the worship of Mary has left fragrant footmarks in the flower names of that Lutheran country. They have her apron and her hairpins, her golden shoes and hair-sieve, and many other belongings; but in Sweden they not seldom assign the same plant to the Lady Venus, perhaps the older form of the same cult—now you know which flower I mean. Well, one breaks off the stalks and stretches a string taut, two hold it, and a third threads the flowers close together along

it, then the string is drawn together and tied so that all the flowers turn blossom outwards, a fragrant, exquisite fretted golden ball, with dottings of ochre red. I can see the fields, and the gracious blue of the sky, and the bright ball circling from one eager hand to the other to the cry of "Tisty, tosty, tell me true, shall I have a lover too?" I have the gaiety of it somewhere in me yet—are you the answer to the question?

Youth ought to be play-time; it's wholesomer education than cramming. I am glad of my lawless upbringing, in which punishment, nor, indeed, any admonition, played a part. I can see the mother sitting on the hearthrug, a long braid of satin black hair, bronze when the firelight caught it, hanging down her back over her crimson shoulder shawl. She is helping us to roast chestnuts. Can see her teeth gleam like freshly peeled almonds, and her eyes sparkle as she smiled, and when she smiled one *had* to kiss her somewhere, on the tip of her little worn bronze slipper, the end of her tail of hair, or the side of her throat, and when we all tried to kiss her together she sometimes fell over, a child amongst her children. And we adored her—

sprawled over her like whelps, and we laughed when she laughed and wept when she wept, and we always made her eat the creamiest chestnuts; and we went about with a constant fear of losing her, the dearest, best playmate we ever had; and we always added in catechism class, at the sentence "One must love God above all and before all!" a *reservatio mentalis* of our own, in which we told God quite privately that we didn't and we couldn't, for we loved her best. And if it could have been put to the test, I believe we would have one and all, with our hot, undisciplined, passionate child hearts, have suffered torments and the assurance of prospective damnation to save her a pang. The child is the woman in miniature. The memory of my "sweet balls" works in me still, heart's own! and I have never forgotten how to play in reality; perhaps even then I was storing up joy towards the time, at the end of long wandering, when I was to meet the one soul to whom whatever of treasure there is in myself might bring healing and gladness.

What was it you said so prettily? "It is with me as if I have been a wanderer, sitting by the wayside barren in all that makes

life worth; then suddenly you came and gave me the precious casket of yourself, and the years have dropped away from me, and the laughter and the joyance and the careless frank outlook of youth for which I have yearned so and never possessed have come to me in a richer measure than ever I hoped for in dreams—and in return you say, 'Love me; take care of me; make me yours,' as if life could hold better than the realisation of that wish." Oh! the spring has crept into me, love, and I cannot wait long now; I want you to lift me up in your arms, out into the free air, and to carry me up to some place where we two could be alone with the spring in our own hearts, and in God's good world about us.

The whole of Nature is rippling with laughter; it is in the brook and the leaves and the breeze, in every note of the lilting birds, and perhaps most of all in myself. I like you; I am fond of you; I care dearly for you; I wish for you, yearn for you, ache for you; you are dear to me, precious to me, all the world to me, and when all these are added together they only mean—I love you! and you me? Tell me, I am one wait to hear!

III

MAY, *Sunday Eve.*

BEST BELOVED !—You whimsicality in breeches ! You thing of a hundred whimsies, each one a reason for laughter and loving ! You are probably sitting in that disordered den of yours, surrounded by dusty protocols, that not all the scents of Araby would rid of cigar ; sitting conjuring me to you in the smoke rings —I come behind you ever so softly, and put my hands over your eyes. I know, I can feel you start, I won't keep them very long there, 'twere a pity, dear, to hide what I know I should see in them, for love comes graciously, lambently into your eyes — but just long enough to feel you shiver with recognition of what you once called "the dearest touch in the world, unlike all others." And when I take them reluctantly away, you draw in your

breath sharply, and then you put up your arm and I share your chair.

I am tired, pleasantly tired, and as when I am glad I go to you for gladness, what more natural than to go to you for rest? Where have I been? what was that you called me? "May moth! with the freshness of the young summer about me, the perfume of wood worts." Nice thing! Love makes a poet of you! I've been over the hills and far away following a Tom the Piper's Son melody of my own, in search of a chapel of ease, where they sometimes hold Benediction. Such an evening! The east winds have kept back all the foliage, but the blossoms, amorous things, as all young things in love in too great haste, have answered the whisper of spring and are prodigal of florescence. Gracious is the word to best describe the mien which Nature wears to-day. Shall I tell you of my walk? I know, greedy thing! but am I not telling you best that I love you in giving you the sight of my eyes.

Listen: across a clover-field, millions and millions of trefoils; if you are good and don't make me creep down my back by kissing my neck, you may have one I found with four

leaves—for luck—our luck! I was glad, for I was thinking of you, and took it as a good omen for us—for is there anything now we want singly? Always *us*, never *I*. Then past a bend of the river (full to-day, for the mills are resting), rushing under a quaintly constructed wooden bridge. I halted there a moment and watched a school of roach in a slant of sun-lit water, playing "follow my leader" between the washes of green weed. A turn brought me to a hamlet with a diminutive post office and an old rubble-stoned church, with toppling grave-stones sacred to the memory of many local Fidgets and Death. Bad enough to walk through life with the name of Death, but worse still to be branded as a Fidget in one's eternal sleep.

I never feel dull in a churchyard, for two things always come back to me. One, the remark of a disreputable vagabond with whom I once shared the shelter of a lych-gate during the passing of a summer storm. He was gazing resentfully at the peaceful grave mounds when he turned suddenly and said: "I hate the dead worse nor the livin', they're so darned indifferent to the whole bally show!" And the

other was the romancing of a little brother long since asleep under a stretch of veldt. He used to spend hours, as a merry curly-headed little lad, in a big cemetery; I asked him once what was the attraction? "Lots of fun," with his brown eyes dancing: "when the dinner-whistle sounds and all the men go away, I hide near O'Connell's monument, and then a funny old gravestone under a pear-tree is pushed up, and a skeleton jumps out in a brown bone suit, and he has a fiddle made of coffin-wood, and he sits cross-legged on his headstone and gives a scrape, and then lots of the graves, all old ones, open, and they come out—all sorts of whitey-brown bone skeletons—and he plays jigs and reels, and they set to partners and batter away on the gravestones, to 'The Priest in his boots' and 'The Devil's salutations to a dish o' nettles,' and lots more queer old tunes; and when they're dry they eat pears; and the funny thing is that as fast as they eat them they drop out through their ribs," adding with quaint gravity, "it makes rather a mess on the stones."

Silence everywhere. You don't know what I mean when I say Silence, the Sunday silence of rural England; it's getting rarer, for the

Salvation Army Band is desecrating it. Past a homestead, the orchard a snowdrift of cherry and plum bloom, up the rising path that wound over a ridge of gorse-clumped ground ahead of me. Once up there my footfalls made no sound, a silent ascent—through the olive-green, golden-flecked bushes. Those in the distance looked like fantastic velvet hummocks of shot gold and green. Then a stretch of flat upland. Larks soared and quivered, and dropped and soared again, or hung poised above, emitting bursts of intoxicant melody, mad notes, that suggested the delirium of passion, the quintessence of joy.

If you analyse, the quintessence of all joy is motion. I stopped suddenly, for straight before me were two heath fowl courting in dance—hops, jumps, quivers, retreats, advances and saltigrades, with singular notes and strange flutterings of wings. I scarcely breathed, but they felt my nearness, for they rose with a startled whirr and throaty screaming cries, and flew in opposite directions—I hope they will find one another again. Happy birds to court in dance on an altar high above the valleys, with the fragrance of clover and whin rising in

incense all around them, to a choir of larks in blue sky hymning! I wonder! suppose I had turned to meet you, would we have broken into dithyrambic measures?

Laugh! I can but laugh at the idea of your cutting flourishes as did our feathered lovers. You needn't wrinkle up your brows; of course, I always laugh at you. Is not that just one of your charms for me? You, you! Own it, your heart would have danced in your eyes to meet mine, and you know, for I have foolishly told you, that mine leaps and quivers to a tune of laughing music when I know you are near.

Ah, if you could really have looked down with me to the prospect below—woods and glades, trimly tilled fields, and the gable ends of many a homestead. Why has the word "home" a new meaning? Something stirs in me when I say it. I used to think of it merely as a term for a dwelling-place. It means more than that now, and will mean still more. The circle which we will draw round our two selves —our sanctuary for the sharing of all joys and all sorrows, from out where we will shut all the world—a nest warm and white. The track was pleasant to walk on, for the heath is resi-

lient and gives one's step buoyancy, and led me through fields of sprouting barley and across many a stile. Everywhere patches of tender green foliage amongst skeleton trunks and branches, the poplars still absolutely bare. They had the whimsical effect, against the clear blue of the sky, of having been dragged through water and then planted upside down.

"Cross the road, go over another stile, then skirt the wood," so ran my directions. I came to the wood and then stood still. God, dear, what sweetness! The ground was blue with wild hyacinths, one stretch of blue with bosses of golden primroses. The chalky white of the Stars of Bethlehem peered up inquisitively as it climbed through the dark green of the hedge, and the ivory white whorls of the nettle broke the deeper green of the bank lower down. The fragrance of the wood had an unexpected quality in its freshness, something intimately sweet, as the smell of a freshly laved baby's skin. The cushats called with tender melancholy insistence, and when I reached the mere where two swans gyrated slowly on the pivot of their own stateliness, I found the grass there high, hair-fine, offering a tempting couch.

I sat down; the scene was too lovely; I gave up the quest; what better chapel of ease could I hope to find? I sat and I wished; if a wish could incarnate a man, solve the problem of the disintegration of matter, the transport of the atoms through space and reintegration at will, dear love, you would have been with me. I closed my eyes and let the fragrance of an elm tree above me work in through all my senses. I lay back and looked up, and gave quite involuntarily a cry of delight, caught my breath in wonder, for I was under a tree more like the magic trees of fairy lore than anything I had ever imagined—an elm, a giant elm in full florescence. Thousands of pale green roses, swaying in clusters with tender shoots and spikes of leafage, just enough to break the sameness of the myriads of rosettes. As the eyes grew accustomed, I could distinguish the tiny seed-specks, cinnamon-hued, on every cluster. And straight up through the wonderful rose drifts a diapered fretwork of sky of exquisite bird's-egg blue. A magic tree of tender green roses, myriad whorls of beauty!

A chime of bells broke the calm, but not a sound of voice nor sign of humanity. Let

them ring, just pleasant notes in a glorious symphony and no more. I am conscious all at once, with a strange satisfaction, of how little significance they really hold for me. It is Protestant England! I find myself saying, with a sense of relief. I feel convinced that my forbears on the distaff side dip in the balance, and that I would have sided long ago with them on the side of individual conscience against black-frocked Churchman, flouted bell, book, and candle gaily, and cried, Away with sacerdotal hegemony! *Rosa mystica! Ora pro nobis!* If you tell the truth to yourself, it is only in such moments of exaltation that one ever bows in actual worship—moments called up in us by beauty, joy, sorrow, or some intimate revelation in a moment of solitude, almost a turning in the lock of a universal key to open the portal of the great mystery of our cosmic being, our intimate relation to the All Spirit behind, who is never so near revealing himself to us as when we are alone with Nature. Have you not felt it ever on some moonlight night at sea when the crowded order of the billion stars overhead scintillates in the restless mirror below and the

witch moon draws you magnetically; or in a dark forest when a hundred unseen eyes peer at you, and the trees have a human companionable quality, and the earth a familiar savour with whispers of kinship?

Worship worthy of the great Spirit behind the All, worship, heaven storming in its exultant recognition of the divinity in oneself, soaring on threads of light to the throne of the great Spirit—proud because conscious of one's atom value in the wondrous whole; humble because of the bar one's material sheath imposes upon clear understanding. All other worship is perfunctory, audacious in the impertinence of its distractions; for confess, have you not noted the specks on your nails, or the cracks in the patent of your Sunday boots in the Holy of Holies?

The elm overhead is my *Rosa mystica!* Every flicker of sunlight conjures a fresh picture. A breeze steals tip-toe through the undergrowth and sets the censers of the bluebells all a-swinging with a wild wood incense, while the cushats and larks and blackcaps lead off a whole concerted choir. How we two could hold service here together, just you and

I, our own high priest and priestess, needing no mediator to lay our worship at the feet of God.

The whimsical idea arises that this is matter for excommunication and the fires of Hell; and the good folk on the benches down there would see us in their mind's eyes getting hence to the left of the judgment bar! But I slip my hand in yours, and you hold it tightly against your heart, because in that way you have my arm too, and our eyes meet and we smile, for, why here too we are at one, and will take the risk, mortal and immortal, of the God worship that is in both of us, because of the wonderful thing that has come to us, and the delightsomeness of this temple for worship! My intense desire must have brought you to me; tell me when you write! For when I wished to rise, I felt how you lifted me to my feet and held my face in the cup of your hands and caressed me with a long look, for you knew (how I love you when you understand!) that in such a mood I would like that better than your lips! and so we mounted hillward again. I know that when you write you will tell me you were with me. Did you feel when we reached

the crest of the high land how I turned, and put up my arms and drew your dear head down, and gave my mouth to your mouth ?—because you had waited. Up there above the valleys, and mills, and factories, and the traffic of road and river, in the clean and the clear of the wind-swept downs.

And the sundown mated with my afternoon services. The western sky was a harmony of gold and yellow, with no touch of common red ; the effect was curious, for in the east the sky was dull with a promise of wind and stress in the huddling clouds ; so that it almost seemed as if they repelled the reflection of the glow in the west, and crushed it down on to the flat lands below—so that the straws in the wheat rick seemed transformed into ingots of purest gold, and gracious shades of aurous light appeared in the ranker meadows ; and the trunks of the pollard willows were copper-red, with a gold alloy, and the whole of Nature seemed to wear a tinge of the purple flush of evening, with motes of gold quivering through its sereneness—and as I turned into the little fruit croft, the topmost sprays and wreaths and tufted bosses of the wondrous white cherry

tree turned rose golden in a way that only a Japanese artist would dare to limn.

Are you tired of my talking? Dear love, I am tired myself, pleasantly tired, and my ankles ache, and were you here you would kneel and take off my little dusty shoes. Do you remember how I laughed at you, a laughter that was all aglow with tenderness, when first you offered me that courtesy, you who a year ago would have thought such service for a woman all menial—I should want more than that to-night, much more, for my church-going has left me in a vestal mood; I should want you to roll up all your own love-need into a little tiny pellet and hide it away somewhere, and then to take me into your arms and hold me ever so gently, and just smooth my hair and say: "Rest, little one!" Could you? I'd trust to it.

IV

KIND LITTLE LOVER,—You remind me of a wandering musician I once heard, a genius, for you play on my soul as some mystic harper, setting all the strings a-quiver to a wonderful soothing music—and then you sue with humility as if I were the music maker, and not just the instrument, struck to melody by you, for a dole. You tell me that with me life has worth, without me nothing to offer. "With you I am the richest man in the world, without you I could not even be called poor, for existence will have no value!" You ask me how I know you are growing stronger? From your own words, because you say: "I yearn for you, I ache for you, I stretch out my arms for you, I want to draw you close to me, and then my new-born, stronger, worthier self gets the better of me and whispers 'You must not trouble her, not trouble her!' and I take your

dear head quietly on my shoulder and smooth your hair till you fall asleep as if you were, in sooth, my little child."

You say that you are daily more drawn to me, only happy when with me: "When with you I notice nothing—my senses are lulled—only soul, intelligence, will, are more alert than usual." Love, darling, the milestones in our road of life tell a smaller number every day—you say to me that I have taught you how to keep love *for* a woman, but you beg me to teach you how to keep the love *of* a woman—how to keep a woman always for yourself. I can tell you a little, not much. You must find out for yourself. Go to school in your own heart—when all is said and done it is most important for you to keep your love for her. For in measure as your love is small or big and you yourself love worthily or unworthily, so will you be as a man. Your love and you are one. It is the language of your whole personality. Shall I tell you—(I take it that as a true lover you want to draw an individual conclusion from the generalisation you ask me for)—how to keep this woman's love?

Never kiss me from habit. Never let me

feel your lips touch mine without knowing that the heart and soul of you come along with them. Never demand of me as a right when I am your wife, what you would have to sue for were you my lover or I your mistress: never, never, never; never let me realise that you desire me as a woman merely with lust of your body; never make me feel a female. Let me be your woman, chosen out of all women, a thing to be treated reverently, out of deference, if no more, to yourself. Never tell me an untruth or act one with me. Better say to me, "I am a little weary of you and your caresses, I would be free for a while to myself," than offer me a sedative lie, seek to lull me to a security my intuition would soon tell me was false.

Let me feel absolutely sure of your obligation of truth to me; better confess a passing infidelity, not touching on your essential loyalty to me, than try to deceive me. Never let me feel less worthy because you have gained possession of me —I knew a man once who kept his wife a sweetheart always by never failing to keep her supplied with a flower. She never woke to a realisation of having lost her lover in gaining a husband. If you analyse it, the lover is more

satisfactory to one's desire of cherishment than one's house-bond.

Remember too that what is always a satisfaction to the man may be a sacrifice to the woman—a pain not a pleasure. That the more generous she is, the more care must the man who loves her take not to draw over-drafts on her tenderness or wish to please him—or fear perhaps to deny him. The generous woman is too often treated as a bank upon which all her lovers may overdraw their accounts. The man who loves her must protect her not alone from himself, but from her own love for him—she must feel him as a shield between her and all the world, and not least—herself!

There is my answer to you, and I know you will sit and ponder on it, I can see you! and you will say maybe to yourself: God help me, it is difficult! Not a bit of it—if you once know what the woman you love thinks about it, and if you are not afraid to let her see the working of the troll in you, and the fight that you, and perhaps most men, have to keep him in subjection.

Man is, at least in his relations to women,

much what woman makes him; and she has been as second-rate an artist in that direction as in most else she has undertaken. Mothers, sisters, and sweethearts, and in some cases wives, from the time of his first breeching till his manhood have all lied systematically to him about themselves, their wants and their desires; and when he, rarely having the woman's gift of intuition, her faculty of arriving at conclusions by processes of induction or deduction so shadowy as to escape consciousness and elude reason, fails to understand her, she rounds on him for his blundering. That is why the good man is often worsted in the eternal game man *versus* woman, and the scoundrel with a dash of brute in him succeeds each time. No woman in her heart really believes that she is angelic, much less an angel. That is only dear man's hyperbole. Do you remember what poor Nietzsche said?

> Der Mann schuf das weib—woraus doch?
> Aus einer Rippe seines gottes—des Ideals!

Man created woman—out of what, then? Out of a rib of his God—the ideal. He did more: he fashioned in accordance with his own

ideas a pair of wings for her, and she has worn them ever since to please him—but the first thing a company of women of the world do, when they are alone together, is to lay them aside with relief.

I remember wondering once as a girl-child what a clever old Irish attorney meant. He was a confirmed bachelor, but the confidant of every woman in the county. We went into a room full of mirthful matrons in a country house one day; he excused himself with a cynical laughing apology as they stopped in embarrassment, and as he led me away he said: "We are better elsewhere, my dear, they are telling a ladies' story!"

Ah, now you shake your dear head, and you just kiss my hands, because you quite properly don't believe me and you call me in spite of my scepticism "your own white flame!" And you lift me up and set me on a pedestal, and I feel very small and all unworthy, because I have always tried to tell the truth to myself, a much more difficult matter, when all is said and done, than telling it to other people; and I say ever so humbly a little prayer to the Great Spirit behind all the problems of

you and me and all men—to close your eyes always, even as I do now by brushing your lids gently with my lips, so that you may never take me down for anything I say or do from the height where you have graciously placed me.

But it is lonely up there, love, and only does on solemn ceremonious occasions when the love in us both almost becomes a religion, revealing the thread of the divine in us. But for every-day life lift me down and let me lay my wings aside and cloister the white flame in the inner sanctuary of myself; and just think of me as a little faulty human woman, who would like to sit at your knee and watch the faces grow and fade in the fire on a common hearth, whilst the kettle croons a wonderful little song of the poetry of the every day; sit where I can stay your caressing hand with my lips as it strokes what you are pleased to call the dearest head in the world!

This is a curious, I am afraid you will think it unsatisfactory, letter; but it is as I had it in me to write to-night, and so it must go to you—you sorcerer, who has found the "open sesame" to my heart. By the way, have I ever told you that—strange, marvellous, inconceivable, foolish as it may seem—I love you!

V

MIDNIGHT, OPEN WINDOW.

MY TWIN SOUL!—I come to you, for I heard you call. I have been reading your last letter in the moonlight. It is a strange meteoric night. There is a curious movement as of the stir of clouds at rest, and flashes, scarcely indeed so definite as that, of light, the distant shooting of falling stars, sparks struck off the silent rushing wheels of the chariot of night. The milky way is marvellous, exquisite, a lace-work of glittering spangles on the blue-grey drapery of Night. And the magic aura of the moon-lady seems to affect me and to make thoughts obscure in the day lucid in this hour.

Your dear letter pained and delighted me. You are coming a long way on the road to me; it seems to me that every dream of my soul,

every stir of emotion, every throb of my senses, every fleeting light and shadow that flits across my inner consciousness, finds its way to you on some thread of light, some wireless psychical telegraphy stretching between your entity and mine; for, when I am full of some thoughts, your letter comes and I read your consciousness of what is working in me, your appeal to me to put my thoughts into words for you to read, to make my fancy something concrete that you may possess it.

You say those two sonnets I sent you made you forget everything in the world for a spell, except "the glory of being loved by you!" and that you wished to go out on to a high mountain and call out, so that all the world might hear how happy you are; that you have an idea that every one about you must know intuitively of the great good thing, the wonderful stroke of fortune, fate has dealt you! and you ask me to tell you, because you want it put in my own words, in order that you may test if the newborn intuition in you has interpreted it rightly to you, why I left you when I did, why I hurried away just when we stood at the threshold of our kingdom.

ROSA AMOROSA

Dear love, I wish I could sit near you and tell you; it is so hard to write when one has to dig deep for the root of one's reasons. Do you remember—I know you do, I only ask you from a foolish desire to have you tell me so again—the hour we two let our souls confess we had found one another? There was more deliberate intention on my part than you knew then. To know what one wants and to dare to seize it when one finds it near is a stride to the realisation of happiness. A true lover owes something to love. Why should not the great lover be a woman? Why should an effete ideal of shame, worthy of a time when love meant physical union alone, force a woman to hazard her happiness by a silence unworthy of her and her love? I think myself cheap when I do a small thing in the ordinary way. I am glad I always found you too fine in your thoughts of love to incline to the conventional and somewhat vulgar idea that a woman should keep aloof, play coy, bring a man to heel like a hound by an assumed coldness, attract him by making the attainment of her a difficult pursuit, a relic of the old days of capture by club—I know it is a safe policy for every woman to follow with all

men. I would sooner be unloved all my life than win a man in that way.

When did I realise our love first? At the very first, I think. I only lived in those hours in which you were near me, and I was always conscious that something stirred in you if I came into the room where you were. Do you recall one day I went out on to the veranda to look at a marvellous sunset? It was in the first days of our acquaintanceship; we had not spoken. You were there alone, and I noticed how the blood rushed to your neck although you had not looked round, and I stood and gazed westwards, but I could hear my heart thump so that it seemed to me the whole world around us must hear it, and I felt a kind of childish relief that the others inside, laughing as they took their coffee, made so much noise. And I watched the brazen globe drop slowly to the horizon and then disappear with a jerk, as if pulled down suddenly by some unseen hand; and I turned and our eyes met, and you came nearer, or I went nearer, I have never clearly known which, and we looked at one another. Your eyes lost their normal expression of weariness and distaste, and

became one intense startled question broken by a flash of resentment, the resentment of an egotist startled out of his cultivated reserve. It was almost a fear, and then suddenly it turned into a look of devotion that made me want to draw you to me, as if I had been looking for a child to cherish and come unexpectedly on the little thing playing alone.

You have told me since that the look in mine startled you, because it held and probed you, so that you felt every unworthy thought or action of your life must be known to me; and then all at once a smile of tenderness grew in them which made you afraid, because it meant the loss of your freedom were you to meet it often; and because it carried with it a complete understanding of you and your needs you wanted to drop down and bury your face in my gown—but the others came and we saw one another no more that day. You kept aloof because you were reluctant to go into bondage, and I sometimes chafed because no one had held my thoughts or disturbed my dreams before, and we met every day—and never spoke, the only two in all that caravanserai unknown to one another.

I waited, surer of myself every day, and then

one afternoon some one presented you formally to me and we talked and our eyes laughed because we had been speaking so long before—but yours hurt me none the less.

Sometimes you resented my power over you, and would leave me abruptly and keep away for days, so that I only saw a pale, troubled face, with a moody introspective look, or heard your voice abrupt, irritable, if any one addressed you. Yet I knew that you always were aware of my presence, and that if I were absent you sought restlessly, or asked guardedly, until you discovered my whereabouts. Sometimes you would seek me and break your silence and let me see all the morbid crannies in your tortured self, your doubts, disgust of everything, self-distrust and yearning for understanding affection.

It was a curious scroll you used to unroll for me in such moments, a quaint human document written in such crabbed characters, and yet in between many a golden initial letter and purple patch of thought. I used to note them as I listened. It became a necessity, do you remember, to say good-night, and to say it alone—away from prying eyes—do you recall it? I

remember it was in the long corridor ; I put out my hand to you, and you looked at me in such an awed way and shivered a little when you took it, dropped it abruptly and hurried away, but we were never strangers after that. And each day brought us a tiny step nearer, each day held something of significance. Once, perhaps you have forgotten, I sat and talked of some abstract subject with a fresh visitor, was interested and laughed gaily—wondered where you were, got uneasy yet stayed talking—then the lights flashed out and I caught a glimpse of you hurrying away ; you had been sitting quietly there a long time, and you avoided me though I felt you watched me for some days, and when I caught your eyes they were full of resentment and reproach—and then I got angry, for you had no cause for jealousy, and so it went on and I kept in my room, for it worried me, and worried me most because I felt I was bondswoman in a new, strange, unescapable vassalage.

Then one evening I was sitting reading, you knocked, I knew your step and I cried "Come in" —striving to steady my voice, and you stood inside the threshold and scanned my face with

suspicious troubled eyes — queried harshly, "You have been ill?" I felt that if my face or ringed eyes had failed to tell a straight tale to you, you would have scorched me with a look, and left me as abruptly as you came. I made no answer, I think. You rushed off with the same suddenness—I could hear your nervous step echo down the corridor—and came back with a new book and some violets. I took the sweet things and put them in my breast, and closed the door so that you might see I wished you to stay; and then all at once your eyes lit up with much more tender fire than you yourself knew, and you pushed me gently into a chair and stood looking at me for a moment, and then you looked round and read the names on my books, took up the little things that were on my table, examined everything with the curiosity of a child. I had added some new verses in a vellum book; you did not know I wrote, and you took it up and I sprang to my feet and stayed your hand, and you shrank into yourself at once and dropped it as if I had stung you. And I couldn't stand it, and I caught your hand and put the book into it and said: "Don't misunderstand: my most intimate,

absolutely most intimate thoughts are in that book ; you would like me less if you thought I could let you see them before I knew you better —no one has ever seen all of it. It is not mistrust ; you can take it and keep it if you like, and when I tell you, if ever I do, you can read them." You remember that, but you don't know how you looked when you gave me your hand, saying : "Thank you for that !" I very nearly kissed you ! I used to feel I wanted to laugh at you, you were such a mass of jealousy, touchiness and whimsies ! I am convinced grey eyes were given to oddities of your nature as a dispensation of Providence in favour of the one who loves them.

And then one day, when the folks and their ailments got on my nerves, and a wild wander mood seized me, I went woodward to explore; and climbed higher and higher, intoxicated by the dry clear air, and words kept dancing into rhyme, and I sang the verses as I went ; and then I saw a wonderfully beautiful tree, and I stopped and laid my cheek to it and whispered to the spirit in it and laughed happily as I said, "Now I have told you my secret !" and I kissed a wound in the bark and ascended again.

Then a summer storm broke and I sought shelter in a rude hut of logs and lichen and bark fashioned by the woodcutter, and I sat there on a couch of bracken and crooned to the rain and the exultant feeling in myself.

Suddenly I heard a step, your step, and you came straight to it and stood all bewildered, speechless, insanely glad when you saw me and I beckoned you in with a laugh, "the elfin laugh of a wood-wild spirit, with nothing of flesh and blood in it," as you have told me since, and you sat next me without a word, only looked and looked with questioning eyes; and then the rain ceased all at once and a sun-slant unrolled a golden carpet to our doorway, and I rose and you followed, and outside I was all shaking with the silence and our nearness. I said; "There must be a lovely view from there," and I pointed to a flat boulder at the top of the winding road. You said: "Let us see if there is," and your voice was broken and husky, and the water was trickling in crystal rivulets through the grey boulders and brown fir needles, and you turned and lifted me in your arms and carried me up; and when we got to the stone you held me a second and then

set me down gently and took my hand, and we gazed down at the vast expanse of wood and water and curling smoke-rift, and many a tiny sail glittering like silver crescents in the grey of the valley—and we turned downward in silence and you still held my hand, and we avoided one another's eyes; but when we reached the high road near the dwelling-houses you stopped and laid my hand on your other palm and looked curiously at it, as if it were something detached from me, and you laid a kiss in the palm of it and closed my fingers over it and put it at my side. And I was conscious that the other guests —those who went with rested nerves, and those who came to start "the cure" and heard of us from the others—regarded us inquisitively; but no one spoke of you to me, but I felt their curious gaze upon us when together.

Wonderful days! each day the making of a marvellous tapestry, adding a fresh stitch to the whole broidery; and the tiny things that made each stitch would have seemed meaningless to any but ourselves. A look, a touch, an accidental meeting, the sudden flush or blanching of a face—anything, everything. Then you kept away and I stole to your room, but at

the door my courage failed me, and I went softly away. You were asleep in your arm-chair, you say, and woke suddenly with a curious feeling of my nearness, sprang to your feet, and opened the door to see me turn at the stairway. Then I sent you a message one evening, for your eyes haunted me. I can see you again as you came in—pride, resentment, wonderment, gladness, all struggling for mastery. You stood waiting, your hands hanging at your side, your lips white, and your eyes asking what you and your soul and your body desired; but no words came. You were smaller than I then, love, for your lips were locked by a pride only founded on a social fiction — a difference of standing—a banking account.

Did I say anything? I don't remember; I only know my arms found their way round your neck, and my mouth gave itself to you, and you held me close with a sobbing cry of wonder, awe, and content—and thus we came "home" to ourselves. I think after that we were just happy for a time, childishly happy. Our lips curved into smiles, twin spirits of laughter lurked in our eyes when we met. They asked us what mysterious joke we shared, what

we had found to laugh at? They little knew we had found ourselves—restless, nervous away from one another, a curious sense of well-being, of absolute rest, came over us both when together. Physical distress, nervousness, all seemed easier when you were near me, as you say it is when I am with you.

Do you remember how we used to sometimes sit an hour together and never speak? Yet it was different from a lethargic quiet, the apathy of indifference—it was a vital quiet, feeding body and soul. Then, as was inevitable, you began to suffer, and it reacted on me. It became harder to part, harder to meet; fever and unrest, the stress of soul that goes with desire, awoke in you, and so I told you I was going. I can't, even now, love, go back to that evening. You recognised that circumstances, the stage of your career at which you were, made parting a necessity, for at least a time, and yet you could not face it; the tears come when I think back of your distress. It hurts to love like that. All the old helplessness, distrust of self, morbid belief in sinister designs of fate against you, increased by doubts of your power to hold me to you, obsessed you again.

And yet I knew that even were the road clear for us two to walk on, I should still have gone, for I have always known that only by a fusing of the spiritual and the sensual in love could I ever hope to obtain the glorious all-ennobled form of love which I desired; that love which has nothing in common with animal impulse, and which alone would satisfy the needs of my nature. I knew what lurked in you better than you did yourself; I knew that you were in a measure a slave to the new delight in you, the young man's joy at having found and having won the soul of the woman of his dreams—you were a bondman to your insatiable desire for me, a serf to the magnetism of my body—but you still held the essence of your soul jealously guarded—afraid to give yourself body and soul to me. And I myself chafed at my need to subject myself to you, I who had always been a free wild spirit jessed to no man's will. Sometimes I hated you for your power over me, and I realised clearly that your body—for the soul of your love was only coming to full awaking in you—stood between your comprehension of me. It tortured you and troubled me, and was a bar to the understand-

ing of each other for which we both so passionately yearned.

Now you know why I went away from you for a year's probation. I recognised that the essence of perfect love for our peculiar natures must be freedom—spontaneity. To develop *singly* on individual lines to the *ultima thule* of our capabilities—to develop *as one* to a greater unity.

You know this now yourself, for you said in your letter—"Ours is a vital love, dearest woman in the world, because it is based upon the most intimate similarities and dissimilarities, that which is intrinsic and extrinsic in our being—our faults and good qualities as they are dovetailed by our attraction to one another. We are one being with two bodies—two men's capabilities and two men's wills—I have given up seeking, for I have found—life can hold nothing better for me. It is rounded, complete."

Dearest, I kiss your hands for that, and because I know you would not have me kiss your hand humbly, I will stand in the light near you so that you may see how that speech coaxed tears, not of sorrow, to my eyes. You say—"Ours is an indissoluble union in which one

loses nothing of oneself, but remains what one has always been—and yet can surrender oneself wholly to a happiness that is as near perfection as human thought can conceive it. We sought one another from an egoistic starting-point, and the great thing is we found one another just because we did so. We are still the same egoists we have always been in our divergent ways, but we have discovered the same aspirations, the same yearnings, the same void in each other that we were always conscious of in ourselves. The wonderful love that is in us both has taught us to know how great, how priceless a treasure such a love is in itself, and what a love-life can be for two entities of such natures, two beings blessed or cursed with such an intense desire, nay, more, absolute need to remain always themselves—be absolutely themselves and only themselves—to preserve to the full what the Germans call their 'Fursicheinheit,' and what they can be, given full freedom, to one another. And if I desire you near me, desire to hold you close to me, to let love make us two one, to be one with you, body and soul. You surely know now, that only so long as there is harmony, reciprocity in our mutual

desire, only so long will it be a desire of mine to possess you. When you want to go back to the sanctuary of yourself, I will wait; for your love will bring you back to me, and only when you return of your own free will, with it in your eyes to me, will I desire you again."

God! dearest heart-mate, how I love you when you write like that, and how I wanted you to see my eyes when they looked up from reading it. You dear, dear, fine spun silk of a man, so you really wonder why I said you had come a long way on the road to me? And this from you, you who couldn't hear the silver chimes of the love-note in your heart because of the roar of the troll beast in your senses. A woman wanted some courage to believe she could control that—nay, I never wanted to control you—I love you too well for that—but to show you the way to do that for yourself for love of me.

The moon is like a gloriously burnished patera, there is a susurrus in the poplars, and a trickling of water between the reeds, never to be heard in the day. See, I have not answered your letter, and I am tired, and you would chide me for my heavy eyes if you were

here—and so I will say good-night. Are you asleep already? If you are I will kiss you so softly that it will not wake you—only make you smile in your sleep as if you dreamt it. You dear, dear love! My Love!

VI

DEAR THING,—"My special good lady!" you call me. You did not know you were using the identical words of the good knight Launcelot to the Queen Guinevere when you wrote that. I have translated them back to see exactly what you meant; one becomes nice in the understanding of words when a hair's breadth of difference may add a deeper colour to loving. You ask me many questions, and, indeed, I want to be obedient and answer all; but it is so much more tempting to go back and dwell upon all the sweet and tender things in your letter, and tell you the tale of my own foolish love for you, you heart troll! You say you can hear my voice as you read, and because you love it so you would have me talking; unwise man, not to know how precious a thing it is to own a woman who can love in silence!

And you really, really want me to answer all

your queries. I'd like better to sit on your knee, and point out to you each special ugliness of yours, and why they make a tantalising whole. A plague on that book of your friend's with all its reasonings! She's all wrong, of course, but I'm content to leave the whole world in error (see how the love of one man can narrow a woman) provided you and I, to quote that Queen Guinevere again, "be not mischieved" by our reasonings. I shall want an entirely new term of endearment, a quite novel caress, to pay me for bending to your wishes in this way. Yes, I know, one eyebrow up, the other down, your special note of interrogation. A room lined with mirrors would not cure you of your grimaces. Are *you* then so poor in the coinage of love's mint? Of course I could invent a fresh caress for every day, and a fresh pet name for all the 365.

Why is she wrong? Because she tabulates woman and her needs as lexicographers words, and she loses out of sight the one dominant fact in a woman's life—her need to love and be loved. She imagines universal suffrage will be a step on the way to remove woman's disabilities: woman's biggest disability is, as it

always has been, herself. She talks of equal rights for woman, by which she either means continence for the man, in a way which can only be called *diablement idéal*, and not supported by the history of evolution; or equal licence for the woman, forgetting that she has had that from time immemorial, except when it was repugnant to her as an individual. She overlooks the one fact that love is incommensurable! The good woman has always been more eager for the soul of love than the carnal side of it; has always been conscious that all physical union is lacking in beauty and purity, when other than the supreme expression of a spiritual attraction between two people; that the obedience of her body to the behest of duty, habit, or anything but love, was degradation of herself—the demoralisation of two souls. Perhaps that she has submitted herself so long only shows how blunted she has become in her finest instincts. Any idea which lowers the ideal of love makes for the brutalisation of the race. In the past she has been only too often a mere tool in the hands of churchmen, a lay-preacher as it were, for the propagation of their false doctrine of renunciation, their prurient teaching

of chastity, and their mistaken appreciation of asceticism and the value of suppressing nature—never, if you analyse it, for the regeneration of humanity or the development of herself—always merely for the strengthening and cementing of the bulwarks of the Church, and its power as an autocracy over souls. Under its influence she has only accentuated the cleavage between soul and senses; and, as a result, her power has been always less than that of her coarser-fibred sister who was frankly and joyously *bête-humaine*. She has always been treated as an inferior by ecclesiastical authorities. Now, when she is learning to think for herself, and to see that the senses, too, have their value, and that to deprive love of all sensuousness, passion, and desire would be to emasculate and impoverish it, she will know how to assign to each of them its proper place—to fashion out of them a beautiful red clay lamp to hold the flame-essence of her love. Her greatest triumph will be to help man to fuse them into the same harmonious whole which they are in the well-developed self-sure woman of to-day.

The best modern women have a greater energy, a richer complexity, an intenser soul-life

than the average man. You tell me you love me for my courage in facing all problems touching me and my interests; for the quiver-in gmodernity in me, for my "Furmicheinheit" —but that I expect much. That is true, I desire fuller life—I demand more, but, love of my soul, I can give more too. Your friend's book is able, interesting, but she is on the wrong track. Broadly speaking, woman has given most of her energy to a development of masculine qualities, instead of a cultivation to the utmost of the best in herself—as woman—with the object of producing the finest type of womanhood, the best result of her peculiar physical organisation, her temperament, individuality, wildness—ay, even of her diabolical intuition—for I believe a knowledge of evil comes to a lad from outside, whereas it may come to a girl from some subtle source in herself—a relic, perhaps, of the days of the whisper of the serpent—for I do not hold with the stoics that the brain of a baby is a *tabula rasa.*

Haven't you ever thought that one's brain is a store of negatives—negatives that give all the past of each individual through each link of the chain right to the first origin? And as one

can see the impression on a glass negative, sometimes by holding it to the light, sometimes by extending it flatly over a black background, so it is with our mental negatives. Some stray gleam of light, some accident of shadow play, may present to our inner consciousness pictures of horrific gloom, loathsome sin as well as visions of transcendent beauty. You and I, every one, has had such experiences in a greater or lesser degree. Places we have never visited in this life ; men and women of past ages we have never even known in books ; degradations we have never suffered ; triumphs we have never enjoyed. May not that elusive, unexplained thing genius, merely be the possession of more highly sensitised plates ; imagination, merely the faculty of seeing the images on the negatives in our store-room ; the gift of poetic expression, merely the selection of the gracious and beautiful, singly or in relation to the others—all possibly merely the unconscious process of "printing off" from the plates stored in ourselves? That the male is the greater artist—(by that I do not mean a man who has exhibited in academies, but the being endowed with a faculty for the revelation or intrinsic beauty for

its own sake alone, without reference to its mere utility)—is perhaps only because his store of inherited memories has been less blurred by physical disturbance, than in the case of the woman. Fathering is joy, relief; in fact all his sexual life is, in its best regulated order, helpful to him. That is scarcely so with the woman. For her, the struggle to work with head and produce with body at the same time is often fruitful of harm. In measure as a woman loses the spirit of her own sex, she will feel the burden of it. As the singers in the Vatican, she may gain a voice of surpassing sweetness in one direction, but the sacrifice necessary is an impoverishing of the whole of her life.

Your friend will perhaps answer that there have been a few great women; and I reply that those who have come down to us most vividly through the ages have been beauties or courtesans. All those who have influenced destinies, been destructive or formative agents in the lives of men of their time, have done so through some physical or mental, always purely feminine charm in their organisation—have been, even when base to the core, whole women. The mere aper of the male is guilty

of *lèse majesté* against her own supreme nature. In the few who have justly, rightly worn the olive crown of fame, I think you will always find a share of some essentially male quality. Indeed, perhaps when we know more of these things, when science will no longer be the exclusive seisin of the initiated, but we will teach in our Board Schools (by that time their failure as educers of latent capabilities in the unfortunate children consigned to their instruction may have led to their abolishment) that nothing helpful to a clear understanding of ourselves can be wrong; and that morality has nothing to do with a rational understanding of sex and its meaning—perhaps then we shall understand that a male spirit may be accidentally held in a perfect female body and *vice versa*—and that such a combination may explain the—I use the word designedly—anomaly of genius in a woman. The *vice versa* is more disastrous. In the case of the woman, she may, if the body holding the spirit be sound, turn out a satisfactory mother, though I think her functions would possibly be limited; and she would be at worst a trouble to herself and a puzzle to man; but in his case he will probably

be a species of intellectual eunuch—the male in him feminised and the female of no sex whatever. The decadent proper rather belongs here. Now am I good? You won't think so when you have to make an extract of this for her—lazy thing! and I know you will seek back through all the letter to find the bits that just concern we two. There are no other people in the world just now, I fancy—just we two!

You say you wonder that an ugly, moody little pessimist can satisfy the needs of my many-sided rich nature. Little honey-tongued flatterer! You say you have as much devotion as passion for me, and beyond both the grateful attachment of a rescued man, drifting hopelessly to destruction, to his saviour. You ask me if I lay awake on Tuesday and went to you at midnight, because I really, really was with you. Really, really, was I? Why ask then?

You say that I am with you more every day, that suddenly I take your arm in the street in the morning and you pass acquaintances without greeting them. That is strange, because I have thought of you lately every morning (I keep a little clock set at your time) at the hour you would be going to your department.

You say: "I seek nothing in the world better than you!" Happy man whose needs are compassed by one little woman; but shall I tell you the truth—one holding a danger for me? You seek all the world in that one woman! You say that I come to you in a new way every day, help you, care for you, encourage you; you tell me I own you because I led you out of the labyrinth into which you had strayed, a dark place of sceptical brooding—that I have given you courage and an object to live for. I think your own love for me was the thread that led you out of the maze.

You tell me that you want me insistently, exist only for me, that when you cannot as it were feel me near you, the old sadness, the distaste of everything seizes you again; that I work upon you refreshingly from a distance, that your senses know me, feel me; that when I suddenly appear a lightsome mood empowers you, and it is well with life and you are happy; that whenever you call me I come. Was there ever such an obedient woman? And the strange thing is that it is true; I hear you quite plainly, and I hasten to you—for is not every sense a double sense now, a *sense with a soul in it?*

You tell me that you have nothing, nothing any longer for yourself alone—least of all yourself; that you are never solitary in the old sense. That is prettily said of you. But best of all I like when you said: "Can I not feel you stir in my arms, do I not hold you closely when I go to sleep, but are you not closest of all in the very soul of me, where the thought of you dances up and down and goes with me wherever I go to a haunting melody that makes each onward step a delight?"

Heart of my heart, tenderly cherished half of me! where have you learnt to say the things this woman wants above all to hear? You laugh at me because of my first little cold kisses "like snowflakes blown by some shy breeze to a man's lips." You ought to know that was a compliment to you. I had learned no better way till you taught me, served no light apprenticeship, never cheapened myself with playful bartering. Had listened long years to the lovebird calling in the Holy of Holies of my own heart. A wise woman will always hold the key of that very inner place in her own keeping. Sometimes I stole in there alone, into the inner sanctuary of myself, and lit the lamp,

a crystal lamp, untrimmed by any hands but my own.

And no man has ever even entered the outer court; I have sat alone in there with my dreams. But now the door is always ajar, and you come and go there at will, and the echo of your footstep is pleasant to hear, and your tones penetrate to the inner court; and as one always hears, or fancies one hears, the murmur of the sea in a shell if one holds it to one's ear, so I now always hear the whisper of your voice in there. I put my arms up round your neck, and if you bend your dear head I will say in your ear what I hear there.—Your little R. A.

VII

NICEST MAN IN THE WORLD,—I say you good morning! Such a morning, too: a whole choir of birds intoning matins, no solemn Gregorian chants, but a gracious joyance in the world's beauty and the delight of mating and nest-making. Oh, the freshness of it! The dew sparkling as if Queen Night had been scattering diamonds with the lavishness of an Eastern potentate on a voyage of conciliation to the West. It pearls like a tear in the eye of the violets, studs the horn of the honeysuckle and the moss sheaths of the roses. It is early, no one is yet astir and I know you are asleep still, but if you wake I will tell you why I have been so early afield, and why I feel so joyous, so childishly glad, and so clean, as if I had been turned inside out morally and mentally, and washed quite white of all stain.

It was warm last night, and the moon peered

in and I could not sleep, so I dressed and wrapped a shawl round me and stole downstairs and went out across the silver fields to the river. I knew you, too, would be asleep, or awake perhaps, for you tell me you are away from the city up by a solitary lake outside the tourist track; that you sleep on a heap of reindeer moss and dream; that you find that you are nearer to me now when you can day-dream at leisure; that you were anxious to see if I would come to you as usual every evening; and that you were sitting on a boulder looking across the lake watching the clouds dip over the mountains, when all at once you felt me come behind you, and put my hands over your eyes and blow softly under your ear.

You were quite right, I did go to you just in that way. No use in trying to explain these things. We have our wireless telegraphy. Good things are doubly good if they are beyond the reach of analysis.

It was warmer last night than ever I have known it in England, silken warm, so that one thought of lagoons with flesh-warm water washes and tropical whisperings, and pearls and coral spikes and gleaming fishes. It was only rela-

tively quiet though. Night in Nature in our Isles is never really silent as up with you. One can always hear the rustle of her gown as it were, a perpetual whispering of all kinds of trivial confidences purred into her ear by the trickling of brooks, susurrus of leaves and the flitting of birds and moths. Cocks crow, and dogs bark, and vermin squeal in the hedgerows; but one can thank God at least for a respite from the clacking of human tongues. Up with you she can be silent in the grand manner, so that to break her superb calm seems an impertinence too great for words—almost as if one were to attempt to bawl a cheap joke into the ears of the dead.

I sat on a felled tree, a giant beech—I saw it cut down a week ago, and every scrape of the saw hurt. You may laugh at me, but it did, it brought back the tapping of a surgical mallet and a little lad I once saw in a hospital theatre. He was being operated on for double osteotomy, and I felt every blow in the marrow of my own bones. When the splendid great tree swayed with a groaning wrench and lay prone I felt sorry enough to whisper sympathy to it: I can never regard trees or plants or any objects which

have the power of movement, such as machinery, or, indeed, in a lesser degree, any object whatever, as being without some inherent spirit or soul.

I always pick flowers reluctantly, for I never outgrow my childish fancy that they feel and suffer. I have this sentiment stronger about trees than anything else; I learn to know them and love them, sometimes to dislike them as if they are actual human beings. I remember an old yew tree I once loathed, a vicious, hateful, gallows bird of a tree that looked as if it might tempt a man to hang himself. For machinery I have a quite unreasoning hatred, coupled with a desire to smash it to pieces. I am childishly afraid of the demon in it—for there is, most machinists grow to believe, a malicious inherent devil in particular machines. The Germans have a sense of this when they talk of the "Heimtücke des objekts." How would you translate that—"the inherent malice of matter"?

Well, I sat on my superb dethroned friend, and watched the river and listened to the sighing night air touching the reeds, those mothers of music, into gentle minor melodies. It was wonderful; the longer I sat the more I saw. It

was as if one's day sight had to adapt itself gradually to the night, and then birds and beasts and moths seemed to become distinct in the gloom, and the moon rose above the trees and scattered largesse of silver into the valley.

Do you know what I did? Don't scold me. I simply undressed and went for a swim in the river; there is a kind of drawbridge, so that it can be pulled back once a year to establish the farmer's right of private way; and he takes a penny a year from the labourers who make a short cut across it to their work. I swung in by the chains and startled the rats and sent an otter; I never believed there was one although a "spraint" of some kind marked the grass along the bank, but there he was, sure enough. It was glorious; the water was warmish and like silk. I tried to sit on the moon, but it slid away on a ripple of gurgling laughter as the water rocked. The water mint emitted fragrance as I crushed it. Pan would have loved to lurk on such a night, even in England. Poor old Goat God, his reed pipe nowadays has a note of music-hall melody, he has deteriorated as most else. The long green washes of reeds caught in my toes and slid over my shoulders; the

buoyancy and snap of salt water with its clear freshness was missing ; yet none the less, it was a delicious moonlight water frolic.

As I ran across the meadow to my garments my own shadow was startling by its unfamiliarity. I dried with my cambric petticoat and started for a walk, with my shawl over my head, up the lane. It is frightful, when you think of it, that we are never alone enough to go naked. I have often thought that if by some sudden, subtle, painless combustion every shred of wool, cotton, or silk in the world were to be consumed, that on people's bodies as well as off, so that the whole world of men and women would suddenly stand in nudity, the moral effect would be colossal. All false shame would die a summary death, and the exigencies of continuing the ordinary duties of life would compel people to cast all consideration of it aside. The common idea of beauty would be entirely revolutionised; the human face would lose its undue prominence and become a mere detail in a whole ; straight, clean limbs and a beautiful form be the only thing admirable ; disease and bodily blemishes the one right cause for shame, and, as a result, concealment.

ROSA AMOROSA

I think a walk in the complete solitude of the night brings one nearer the big essential things in life, the great fundamental truths, the first origin of things, chips off which are always the last new truths when all is said and done. One gets a sense of proportion, realises how infinitesimal an atom one actually is in the cosmos.

Yet, singularly enough, a lucid realisation of this fact need not make for humility nor disheartenment, for one feels that one's atom out of place will mar the symmetry of the wondrous whole in a way perhaps too great for our finite comprehension; in spite of the impossibility of our grasping adequately how speck-like our place is in the design. It is just in such a moment that one recognises exultantly that one is the mightiest, the most important thing to oneself in the universe. Indeed, one almost conceives, in such an hour of night communion, the possibility of being the one thing actual—all else, perhaps, phantasms of one's own brain weaving. To confess the truth to oneself means, that one whispers with exultant pride that one is the most important thing in the whole world to oneself—heir to the universe, a

non-entailed heritage. That the experience of all men, the march of history with its warriors, monarchs, and hordes of serfs; its wars, its epochs of peace, its triumphs and defeats, its pilgrims and religion; with their tales of woe and joy, love and hate, the poetry of all time, in short—All the past is just an argosy which has sailed down the river of the ages to harbour at one's feet and disburse its marvellous freight for one's benefit. That all that *has* been in the past and *is* in the present is only of importance to oneself, in so far as it helps as a means of development to one's best selfhood.

I had a hundred vagrant fancies I wished to share with you, you who are nearer to me than all else in the whole world, so that my soul leaps like a flame and flutters at the memory of your voice, and burns steadily in the assurance of your love; you, without whom I feel imperfect, to whom I must belong if ever I am to be my whole self.

And if I tell you my crack-brained fancies, perhaps want wit enough speculations, it is because the whole of life has a new meaning through my love for you. You, too, are conscious that to have me for your own is the only

way to feel that you may quit seeking and start life as a completed creature, with all that is necessary to your best equipment as a fighter. In short, you wish to own me, you say, "as the best means of owning yourself."

Do not think I took my walk with grave pondering on the hidden meaning of big problems. I "shoo'd" beasties in the hedges, and caught myself laughing many a time at extraordinary things I wanted to say to you. New ways of saying the old tale of my love for you. You as man (though, mind you, you have a dash of woman in the expression of your complete devotion), perhaps, feel more delight, because in me you fancy you have found the woman of your dreams realised; and your soul content and the gladness in you finds its best expression in the lightening of the old gloom in you, the spur it has been to endeavour, an incentive to work and take your part as a man, the desire to protect the one you have chosen at all costs. But I, as a woman, realise that it is only when love is the medium, that woman wakes to a complete understanding of herself and all in life.

Love makes of life a palimpsest! The moods

of Nature are merely settings for the moods of her emotion; she can never be a true philanthropist, for the welfare of all humanity is a small thing in the heart of a natural woman, weighed in the balance with the welfare of her "own man." And perhaps this limitation in a generous-souled woman makes her greatest worth—is the keynote of her conservatism, making for solidarity, home-building. For without love, and love for one man *or* the children conceived willingly and borne to the man of her choice, she is and always will be a jerry-builder in nest-making. The one thing necessary for her is to love, bigly, generously, without exigence, just for the sake of loving; because it is the "open sesame" to the realisation of her own treasure-self—not as an end to win love, or acquire the right of hobbling a man in his Alp-climbing moods. In measure as she is capable of loving unselfishly so will her influence be; for in such measure will she make or mar the fate of the man who loves her.

When all is said, man perhaps, when he *does* love, loves better, more singly purposed than woman. He has more to lose by getting into the domestic harness. A chivalrous, unselfish

man, with the weakness that a lothness to give pain, to be hard when necessary, lends to such a nature, is as helpless as Gulliver in the hands of the Liliputs, in the grip of a woman whose idea of love in marriage is the right to make demands; not alone to hold first mortgage on his life's work and his banking account, but to audit his ideals and balance the workings of his conscience. What such a woman considers being loved, is five times out of ten, a subservience to her wishes on the man's part, which is as fatal to his upward endeavour as locomotor ataxy to a man's gait; what she calls loving is either an abnegation of herself she has no right to make, or a balancing of accounts in which she always wants to stand on the credit side.

Just the best thing in the world is that you and I, egoists as we both are, are so completely agreed on this one point: the absolute right to individual freedom, the absolute wrong of any interference with one another, when a question of "right," either for you or me, arises. Neither you nor I believe in any legal tie as binding—it is a concession to public opinion, no more. As long as we two love one another as we do, no power on earth can part us, and

if you should cease to love me, why should I reproach you for that? as if you could explain love's genesis or its death. To upbraid you would be to punish you for having once loved me!

The saddest thing in the whole world, perhaps most because of its futility, is to see a man or woman on their knees trying to fan a dead love into flames in the heart of another. If you loved another woman, it would hurt, dear. God! I can't bear to think of it! but I could still be your friend; I am big enough, I hope, love you dearly enough, am sure enough of myself, to say that; but—now I am going to be honest with you, even though I can see the laughter-light leap into your eyes—I am afraid, sorely afraid, that, in spite of the fact that you call me your great woman so often, I am not big enough to say that I would not feel a little measure of satisfaction if she were to give you a trying time. Don't make any mistake, I may do that myself on occasion, and I know you so well, you thing of intricate and difficult temperament, not to realise that I may have to hold on and sit tight on my own temper at times.

We served our apprenticeship, didn't we?

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It always ended up in the same way. We hated to let the other have the credit of being the one to make up first—at least, I did. There's only one thing in which I am jealous of you; that is, that you might perchance love me better than I you. Now, I am not telling you at all of the adventure which gave rise to all this disjointed disquisition; but I must send it to the post if it is to reach the "little village" to-night and cross the Channel on the first stage of its way to you. It is strange to think of it whirling down through the marsh lands of Essex, lying in its sealed bag in the scarlet mail-car as it dashes through the crowded streets, to more train and the chopping swing of the Channel.

I have quite a grateful, affectionate feeling of interest in every post-office now. So much of joyance and good and glad has come my way since you and I elected to live and love in letters. If ten letters come I feel yours amongst them before I see it, and something in me thumps in a curious inexplicable way in response; and if any one is there I just read the beginning to see how you come, what you call me, and the end, because you leave me unwillingly, and always say your dearest things to

console me for going. I put it under my pillow until the next comes, and love each one better than the one before.

You are calling me all day insistently; it must be because you are all day free, and I am restless because of it. I am with you up there in the supreme quiet, believe me I am, love, and don't try to wile the soul out of my body, for I have a strange feeling that sometimes it doesn't dovetail as usual; have a little mercy on your witch-wife. I can see the initials of your name quite plainly in a cloud-rift up there. It's a poor case with me: the only cure will be to go to you soon. Get strong and well and be glad and good, dear heart; write to me and love me! and don't scold me for not going to sleep as a rational being, for it's every bit your fault, and I am not an atom tired. It is as well with me as with that insouciant lark up there, and the music in me is just as madly, intoxicantly glad; and I am convinced that the best thing in the world for me is my love for you, you wizard of surpassing ugliness and surpassing charm! And the next best is your love for me.

I know you want me, being a man, to put it the other way round, but I am not afraid to

stick to the truth—I love you in all the ways of loving, I like to believe no one knows quite so many as I do. Write, write, write ; for four whole days I have had no word, all rose red and tender, as they come with their trick of creeping in and whispering in me until you call again ; I cannot do without a fresh instalment ; I am like a starved robin sueing for a crumb after four days hard frost. Unkind little love ! Would you have me sue ? I would not say *that* were I near, but I am safe, worse luck, so many leagues away. I remember the evening I did, once before, how you leaped into flame, became transfigured, and carried me off my feet, and only set me gently down when you saw that I was shaken into something so unlike myself that even you were penitent.

Love is an unmerciful recorder of details, but then there are no details when a look, a tone, a word can mean the opening of a magic door to new realms of enchantment. Do you remember in the old fairy tales how those who found the key flower to the entrance of the fairy hills, forgot everything outside in the glamour of the new strange world into which they had accidentally strayed ? We are a little

bit like that when together. Love is the only fairy tale left, and conning fairy tales the only royal road to the realities.

By the way, how have my hands offended? You have not kissed them once in your letters for ever so many days. I am jealous of every missed caress!—Your R. A.

VIII

HEART FRIEND, TRUE LOVER, AND SHAPER OF MY DESTINY!—I was to tell you my adventures of the morning, the one that called to being those verses you think so well of: to one's dream child! I knew you would ask me what made me think of them—I whom you have called your elfin-eyed spirit wife! Not altogether! 'Tis true the wild, wayward spirit in me is the best I own as woman, for it is the red clay vein in me, unbroken through all the ages from time primeval to me; the spirit which will save me ever from becoming the cow-like mother of mediocrities, fathered by habit, out of duty. I never could see any merit in a quiver full of congenital semi-idiots. The man and woman who give one or two beautiful sound-limbed, healthy-souled children to the world are surely more praiseworthy. Do you remember how I shocked that very select

supper party of "rights" when they were discussing the claim of one of your dialect poets for the yearly State Grant, by saying I thought any woman who had produced a prize child had a much greater right to apply for it?

Well, to go back to my morning. I had walked, you know, a long way, and it was nearly five when I neared home; and as I crossed the stile and came through the "five acre" the insidiously sweet perfume of the bean field set a keener edge to my appetite: when I got quite close to the old sheep shelter, I saw a tiny rill of smoke and a knife-grinder's handcart. I stopped and turned aside to explore, for some one was whistling like a blackbird in flute-like notes, no music-hall or martial ditty, but the sweet and reproachful plaint of "Early one morning." A jovial-looking man in corduroy clothes was tending a brushwood fire; he had slung a kettle on three sticks, and had set some mugs and plates on a small clean cloth. This struck me as unusual in a tramp's breakfast. He touched his cap and smiled; he had a comical crooked nose and very white teeth.

Leaning against the shed was a young woman, a delicate-featured creature, with a black sailor

hat and good plain clothes. She held a child with the colouring of a Murillo St. John in her arms. He was asleep, wrapped in a soft shawl; his lashes made a black circle above the exquisite damask bloom of his cheek. I voiced my admiration. She coloured and seemed awkward. The man laughed: "Liza, she's my wife, don't like to be caught tramping; we never slept out before; but she twisted her foot coming down the hill and we couldn't make the town in time, so we turned in here. No offence, lady, I hope?" "None to me," said I, "and as they are all going reaping the other way to-day, no one need be any the wiser. You were lucky," I said to her, "to have so fine a night so that he couldn't take cold."

She had a pleasant voice and spoke with some refinement. The man was making tea, and as the boiling water bubbled on the leaves, and the aroma rose out of the brown pot, I clapped my hands involuntarily—I haven't done such a thing for a decade of years—and I said: "If I fetch you some milk will you give me some tea?" And the man laughed genially. He had brown eyes with red gold lights in them, and kind

twinkles. I could be fond of that fellow myself.

I did a good deal of pilfering in the larder, for I went back with cream in a can, and four fresh brown Bramah eggs, and a home-made bread cake and a saucer of jam. I met the man with a fresh face and pearls of water on the end of his crisp curls, for he had been ducking his head in a runlet to the river; he was carrying the laddie astride on his shoulders. He swung him into the woman's lap; she smiled shyly and dried the bonny thing's face and hands, and twisted the silken rings of his hair round her fingers.

"I have brought my own cup," said I, as I laid my contribution on the cloth. I love vagabonds; I can never see a travelling show without feeling a desire to go behind the scenes and make friends. It does not do to follow the inclination nowadays, for the new generation are seldom anything more than objectionable, low offshoots from London with an eye to gain. This fellow was a character, and the boy might have been a source of pride to an hereditary prince.

I haven't enjoyed a morning meal so much

since you and I shared our breakfast up near the Troll seat. Don't think you were not there; I made you have a part in all that was sweet, and good, and human in that odd *al fresco* meal. The tea was delicious, for I had been right up to the top of the downs and had stood looking down, trying to pick out the seven churches of the seven parishes one can see from there.

The freshness of the morning matched in some way with the unwonted sense of inner freshness I felt in myself—as if the old joyous youth had been sleeping, not dead as I had thought it—an after-glow of the tender flush of life's jouvence, and the wide-eyed ardent outlook of one's gracious nonnage. Something clean, and wholesome and glad, that was kin to all around me, thrush call, bird note and the opening of bud and bloom. A dewy world, charming as tears of delight in a pair of beautiful eyes. We are with our kind always, and yet it is only at very odd moments, and then always with absolute strangers, that we feel the fibre stir in us of common human relationship, the sense of universal kinship.

Smile if you will, heart's own, but I did with

my tinker friend and his woman and boy. He had a dry sense of humour, and I learned all their history. He was left as a baby in a gipsy waggon at a fair. "A 'love child' I expect," he laughed; "the saying is they're always the bonniest." He was fairly educated; a farrier with a couple of other trades at his finger-ends. They had a house of their own in I——, but in summer the old need to wander, to get out into the open air grips him. So, as soon as the warm days come, he starts out on a round of knife-grinding and kettle-mending. Liza had been parlourmaid at a rectory but had thrown in her lot, in spite of admonition, with this fascinating son of Nature. I can quite understand Liza!

I heard more humorous views of progress, shrewd ideas about men, labour and politics, than I ever heard in an afternoon debate in the "gentleman's talking house," to give the House of Commons its gipsy name. "The missus won't let me go by myself," he said, "but we always sleep comfortably in a village as a rule, and I keep near home so that she can take the train on Saturdays. She's got rare high views for the nipper. He's to be a great man some day. Well, I won't interfere as long as he

turns out something, gives him a charnst to be a man. I can't abide a 'gent'; a mechanic with a tall hat Sundays an' a halfpenny cigarette, fair raises my gorge!" "I expect you're very happy," I said. "Yes, I've never known a day's illness and I carn't recollect ever feelin' miserable, if only the missus were a bit stronger." "I'm better since I have been so much in the open air," she said, "and he never lets me do a hand's turn!"

He cleared the things away, and went whistling, with the boy on his shoulders, to take the cart to the lane. Liza's eyes followed them both with a look of supreme content. "He's the best man in the world!" she said simply. And it seemed to me, dear one, that down in the cities and suburbs, where such momentous social questions have to be decided as to whether the Robinson-Browns may not now include the Smiths on their visiting list, since they have begun to spell their name with a "y" instead of an "i," and have given up selling currants retail, and only take orders *en gros*—there were a good many things they might learn to advantage from my knife-grinding philosopher.

I sat on the stile and watched them go down

the road. He carried the bundles and wheeled the cart with the boy in it; and, as Liza stooped to detach a straying blackberry spray from the end of her gown, I thought of the flight into Egypt, I suppose because of the old legend that the bramble must crawl ever on the ground because it tore the virgin's robe. Perhaps the thought that came to me with the recollection would be deemed profane; but these two, this mortal man and woman, no longer two incomplete individuals, but one complete entity, because of the third, begotten and born in love to them, meant tenfold more to me than any Holy Family in legend or picture. Joseph, if one accept the Christian idea, was only a symbol, whereas those three going down the road in the freshness of the gracious sunlit morning, with the fragrance of hay and odour of bean flowers, to the music of bird and bee, were mortal man and woman and child; the best expression of the best and sweetest in life for humanity. No symbol, but a living possible actuality, within the range of all men's grasp. Will you understand if I say that never were you more intimately near to me than just at that moment?

ROSA AMOROSA

Can a man understand that to the woman who loves him a new thought may come, a thought not alone of him and of her, but of a thing non-existent, and yet so actual, that it is as if a tiny hand were knocking at the innermost cell of her heart in a way to make her tremble at the wonder of it? The thought of this possibility made me all tender; and I sat there ever so long in the warm sunshine and span dreams.

I wonder how many childless women go to sleep with a dream child cuddled in the round of their arms? and yet I meet more women every day who shrink from mothering, or who are indifferent to it, if they don't actually dislike children. Perhaps the terrible object-lesson over-population offers has something to do with it—for one cannot but shudder, if one has to pass through poor streets, at the scores of sickly ugly urchins rolling in the gutter, yelling at one another with hideous distorted speech. The stoned prophet of one generation may become the tutelary genius of another; so perhaps a statue of the apostle of limitation may be erected in the market-place of every town some day. Meanwhile something in me is

crooning lullabies, hushing melodies which rock a dream-child in my soul to slumber.

I am longing for a letter ; it seems ages since you came and talked to me, and yet, measured by days, it is not long. Come soon, heart's own ; I am restless, unhappy without you ! Strangely enough now, perhaps, because of the sober thoughts which temper my wild morning mood. I long for you more even than usual. Take me close to you and say everything sweet and foolish you ever said, over again. I want to hear it—you dear Love !

P.S.—I send you my old " Pentameron." I put some loose rose leaves (I remember how you always laughed at my trick of dropping flower petals into my wine) into the chapter I want you to read. The most delightful morning ride I know. How Ser Francesco ambled to Mass in the freshness of spring at Certaldo. See if it gives you as sweet a picture as it did me of that most charming of handmaids, Assunta, tightening the girths, and serving a beaker of sweet white wine as a preliminary ; and of Simplizio, with the hawthorn buds nodding in his green cap, and threatening the

bestiaccia with his blossoming crab switch; dreaming, as well might be forgiven him, of the winsome maid who stayed at home to prepare that enviable dish of leveret.

IX

MY VERY DEAR AND CHERISHED HEART-MATE, —What am I to say to your letter? I read it with smily kind of tears and teary kind of smiles; I was disposed perhaps by chance—no, never chance between us—to understand it more intimately than I should otherwise have done, for you touch in it on things unexplainable in the ordinary way, the strange *rapport* between us two which almost bridges space. I knew it would be waiting to be fetched—you know we get no afternoon delivery. I came down dressed; my landlady said, "The boy has been to the post, and there are no letters." I felt that must be wrong. I said: 'Oh, I will go to town all the same"—something stronger than reasoning, more convincing than the arguments of common sense, the third voice in one beyond all explanation, whose promptings never err, whispered insistently: "Go, go all the same."

I went through the five-acre wheat field ; a triangle is planted with barley : I was in a strange mood. I wished, as I always wish when I see something that must of its nature be "foreign" to you, that you were with me to see it. The barley, with their heads bent and their beards bristling, looked like a field of waving khaki-coloured shrimps. The wheat held itself proudly erect in the glowing heat ; it made me think of stories of great battles. One after another they came to me, from those told in the grand manner of Homer to the immortal fight of Borrow's tinman.

Not the least good thing in the future will be the taking down of book as things come back, to make you read the things I love and that have been in a measure formative for me. You wonder always at the wild strain in me which glories in the description of a well-fought fight ; wondered, I remember, when I said that the play of splendid muscle on a man's back as he pits skill against skill is a sight to make one's blood leap.

Yet you say you love it in me ; I know that. It was at the bottom of all the escapades into which I lured you. You, the gravely trained

bureaucrat, who wore your badge of red tape as seriously as if it were the Legion of Honour. There was a touch of mischief to add piquancy to such temptations, for of yourself you would never have dared to suggest the wild drives, and, from your point of view, almost improper escapades into which I beguiled you. You should have seen yourself sometimes. The quaintest thing in the world is to see the boy wake to life in a man of your kind. It was as if you had been under the influence of some evil fairy who had never let the inconsequent laughter of youth have a chance in you.

I have strayed from my wheat field with its fanciful reminder of battles that are only names, and yet suggest the clash of arms and men at warfare. Whole crowds of names leaped up—Israelites, Amalekites, Christians, and Saracens; the waving of the compact mass was like the passing of serried ranks of men, legion upon legion. Here and there a tall pennant of oats waved in the breeze, a patch of purple meant a canopy sheltering some fair camp-follower perhaps, and everywhere pools and patches of poppy crimson.

Somewhere in myself I could hear triumphant

music, rousing strains calling to the fighting instinct, the fibre that quivers in a woman as in a man when trumpets call and men's feet beat to marching time. Perhaps she wouldn't mother soldiers if she lacked it. One's own fancies can make one strangely, rarely glad at times, independent of all the facts of life, detached in a world of one's own dreams. A world on which no one can hold a patch in mortgage; for, as you see, all the militant mood in me was only set aflame by the waving of wheaten helmets, for the air around was filled with the monotonous churr of the doves "dunting," as the folks up here call it, as they hid in pairs seeking their favourite "dove's-meat," the feathery flowered fumitory.

I went into the post-office and bought some stamps. The girl said apologetically: "I am sorry, but there was a letter; I found it after the boy had gone, amongst another bundle." I felt exultantly glad because of this fresh triumph of my inner "feel" against the arguments of common reasoning. I read it sitting on a stile by the roadside, whilst the larks shivered melody above, and the whirr of a distant reaping-machine broke on the air with hard insistence. The old

swish of scythe was more in tune with Nature's harmonies. Curiously enough, you say in this letter how you love me for my quality of unexpectedness—the moods which made you never sure of how I would meet you next. And you ask me if I do not wonder at the way you fell in with my maddest proposals, although of yourself lacking in the initiative for such ventures. No, I don't think I have ever wondered once, because anything we two have ever done has always seemed fitting, and natural, and as it should be.

You recall the night I took you hillwards to see the dawn rise, and tell me of incidents I had forgotten—recall your impressions of me as you saw me, your boyish delight and strange unquestioning belief in me. I believe you look upon me in the light somewhat of "an adventure." It's good to cast cold caution and convention to the winds at times, to laugh and let one's heart talk, one's spirit be glad, and just live. One can only do that when Conscience, Remorse and Co. have no claims to be satisfied on settling-day; what folks say is a lesser matter.

I knew I must not give you time for reflection: I can remember quite well how I impressed

on the messenger that he was only to give you my note just before the train started. I can recall your start of surprised relief when you saw me waiting with half-anxious dancing eyes at the street corner, for you had a half fear that I was in trouble. And when I said: "Nice thing to come! The night promises to be lovely, the air is like satin, I am going to drive, will you come and take care of me?" you got in without a word and leaned back; you looked tired; the day had been extra long.

The streets were full of sauntering people enjoying the leisure of the evening hour, students and cadets in search of adventure, theatre-goers and courting couples. It was not until we had left the city that you noticed we had taken the road mountainwards and that the vehicle was from a livery stable and the horse extra good, as for a distance. "Where are we going, though?" "To S.," I said, with more assurance of manner than my inner trepidation warranted. "To S.?"—and you looked at your watch—"but, little one, we sha'n't be there till eleven!" "I know," quoth I, "in time for supper! It's there," pointing to the basket; and then—you can't think how comically

startled you looked—"We shall change horses and drive up through the magic woods and the mad moonlight; and we will sit on the Troll seat and see the sun rise; and when we look down the city will look like a Liliput town in a toy box. They say it's a glorious sight. Then we'll come back and pick up the horses and you'll get to your musty old office with its archives and protocols and fusty treaties in time for your day's work." You shook your head and said, "It's a mad idea, you extraordinary child!" "It's a glad idea," laughed I, "a long, delicious, silent drive with never a soul but ourselves on the road, just you and I, up, 'over the mountains high' through the white summer's night, with the night fragrance of the woods, quite different from the odour of day, and a wan moon lady winding silken moon-rays lazily off her silver distaff. You can see the night shadows stealing through the woods already, and the south wind is shepherding the clouds; he wants to pen them in fold on the other side of that mountain, and his brother from the west is stealing a few, just to tease him!"

"There's a big plaid there if you're cold, heart-bird!" was all you said, and we talked as

we always do, never tired of the sameness of the subject; the wonderful way in which we two had found one another and our *one self.*

And you thought I was just a mad atomy of a woman, but there was something lurking under, for you were standing a test unawares. If you had made one false move, misunderstood me by the breadth of a hair, soiled my white joy by a slightest breath, never in sunlight or moonlight would we two set out again to seek the dawn together, but your eyes met mine always as I wished them to. Once only I knew you disturbed, and your voice grew husky and you drew me close with a sudden passion and said, "Love, oh my dear love, how long do you think we two could drive like this?" "Until one of us got hungry!" said I, and the danger was merged in laughter. And we laughed as only children, or a man and woman who have found the missing half, can laugh. And you gave me experiences of your own strange childhood, winter evenings when your mother span by the oven, and told you stories of the were-wolf and the seal-men and the coming of the white reindeer, whilst the actual

wolves howled not too far from your solitary dwelling.

Strange, you and I are never conscious of any differences of speech or race. You come to me in your mother-tongue, and I go to you in mine, and I always understand a new word even if I have never seen it before. And when we could see the light of the posting station shining far above us, an eye of gold in the opal setting of the night, you asked: "What did you tell them down there?" "The truth! that I was going to see the sun rise from the Troll's seat with a friend! It's a sight, I am told, that no foreigner should miss!" And you kissed each tip of my fingers and cried that you knew not if I had more of the wisdom of the serpent or guilelessness of the dove! A woman in love has both, said I, and, moreover, the secret of complete social freedom is to sin against all the conventions—conventionally.

Do you remember the good woman at the station? Her wonder at my "foreign ways"; the madness of wearing silk under a serge gown where no one could see it, only hear its whisper; the warm big room and the good things in the basket: you were fearfully hungry.

On again at midnight under the shadow of the big leather hood, through the wondrous clear white night, when every blossom and leaf has an unfamiliar look in its sleep, a certain motherliness in the way the leaves and sheaths curl and enfold and shelter the coming blossoms. You wanted me to rest with my head on your shoulder, and I said, "No, not to-night, for I am alertly awake, but you shall lean your head against me, and I'll wake you, if you sleep, when we get near the Troll's seat."

You say you can feel still how I rubbed your forehead and cheek with my chin, and you said it had a hypnotic effect; perhaps it had, for you slept like a tired child. There is a certain helplessness in the sleep of even the strongest man which appeals to the mother in women. Not a few women absolutely devoid of philoprogenitiveness proper have a mothering quality in their love for man; and I think if you could have known all the rare, wonderful thoughts that grew in me to strength as I held you there, you would not perhaps have rested so easily.

It was marvellous as one mounted higher and higher up the winding road to look down at times, when the way was narrow, some sheer

declivity and see as it were the clouds huddled in the lower slopes; and watch the silence and mystery and wonder of a night without gloom, a night of pearl and opal—and yet more wonderful to feel you were sleeping quietly. Then there was a sudden shiver, a strange half quiver—I have often noticed it before the dawn—a little stir in the air, in the leaves, along the herbage; I have no explanation to offer of it, it is almost as if the new day were yawning gently as it roused from sleep. Then we halted at the foot of the narrow way leading up to the curious throne of grey rock. I awoke you and you stared sleepily, and I said: "Good morning, seven sleeper!" as I tried to ease my shoulder, and you were all ashamed, penitent, and kissed my hands and asked diffidently—"Didst thou sleep too?"

We lose by having the same pronoun for our lover as our lackey! I shook my head and you asked anxiously—"What did you think, what can you think of me? Forgive me! I was so tired, dear." And I said: "I thought if I watched very intently I might perhaps see your beard grow, your chin is horrible! and my foot is asleep!"

And then we both laughed and you lifted me out, and I told the driver—I don't believe you even noticed what a droll-eyed, stolid chap he was—to fill the kettle and set the spirit lamp alight and watch till it boiled : he grinned like a pleased boy.

But you remember, just as well I am sure as I do, how we watched the sun rise in the freshness of the wonderful morning, and heard the birds call as they woke, and saw the squirrels trim their whiskers ; how you knelt and kissed my hands and called me all sorts of mad names—the sun got into your head a little ; and how we washed our faces in the little crystal trickles that were threading an intricate way through stone and moss and undergrowth to their haven in the sea.

And when I said : wait—and came back with a new clean collar, held it behind my back and gave you three guesses—men are always a little strange to us, most touched by the simple things we do for them, and least moved by our greatest sacrifices—you looked at me with a singular new look in your eyes, laughed more triumphantly, joyously than I ever thought to hear you, and caught me up and held me at the

length of your arms, and when you lowered me to kiss me, you had tears in your eyes; and I believe you thought more of the marvellous fact of my guessing the size of your neck correctly, than you did of the wonder and the glory of the coming of the Sun-god with spears and lances and pennants and banners blazoned with gorgeous colours. For when I turned to go down you called me back and held me closely and tenderly, with a new touch of reverence in your voice, and you whispered, "My dear wife!" and I don't think you knew yourself that you said it, but I knew what it meant—that you had left the troll beast up there, and gained a new fibre of spiritual sweetness like a little spring of crystal-clear water to keep you healthy inwardly in all good manliness; and the soul in me was listening to a voice singing a *magnificat anima mea* in there, for I had set my man's feet in the way I wanted them to walk—for his salvation and mine.

Was there ever such a morning meal? your *naïve* wonder at the resources of an English tea basket, and my manœuvres to get the driver to eat his breakfast on the off-side, where the gentle morning breezes might waft the too

insistent smell of his caraway speckled cheese away.

And that wonderful drive back! Bird's-eye views of the city below developed into greater distinctness at every turn of the road, until the spires of the churches and the tall chimneys of the factories stood out clearly amongst the huddled mass of roofs.

As a rule the morning is a prosaic common-sense comment on the enthusiastic ventures of the night before, but I have—and mark you, I would have you note this as a virtue—an unpurchaseable attribute in a road-mate down the hill of life—a trick of non-apology, a suspicious distrust of the value of regrets to oneself or any one else.

It is a foolish thing to coast down a steep hill, or send your motor-car full speed round a corner; but if you do—because you didn't think, or for the sport of the thing or for any other reason under the stars—don't explain or regret if you smash up at the other end—provided you don't include any one else in the *débacle*. The folks round will offer gratuitously many much more ingenious explanations of your conduct than could ever occur to you, and be entirely

satisfied with their own astuteness—whereas they would of a dead certainty suspect anything you might offer as a reason. This holds good of nearly every catastrophe, moral or otherwise. Never explain! and it's sheer waste of time to sit in sackcloth with a dab of ashes on your head! The old-fashioned penitent of that type did greater credit to church discipline than to his own sense of self-respect. Have a cold tub and do better, say I. The old eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth theory was one of ferocious stupidity, as is any system of punishment which hardens or embitters the criminal; besides being a useless expense to the State. Punishment is only of value as far as it redeems. The performance of useless penances is not half as salutary as the realisation that one's sin may serve as an experience to work for good, if one knows how to draw a lesson for future use out of it.

Do you know why I say this to you? Because from your training you are disposed to consider what folks say too much for your own or my happiness. If I had given you the chance you would have marred that perfect morning by retrospective questionings as to the wisdom of

the gladness of overnight. That is an electro-plated way of enjoying life: it doesn't take much licking to taste the copper. In yourself you are suspicious of it, for you love me for my laughing disdain of the man who makes opinions for the crowd, and the crowds who buy them cheap and ready made. So I made you laugh until your eyes were as clear as the water that was gushing and trickling in a hundred tiny rivulets through the moss on each side of the road, and the *riante* gaiety of the morning was so infectious that you felt, you said when we reached the outskirts of the city, that you wanted to bid every one a glad good-morrow! And you got out to wait soberly for the tram-car, and I whispered, in your impossible language, "May your work be easy; come as early as you can, for I shall weary for you!"

And if you have marked that night, as you say, with a white stone to distinguish it above all others—ah, heart lurer, I have gone one better, for the little white stone I set to remind me of it is streaked with veins of shining gold! I give you both my hands and my mouth too, if what I see in your eyes pleases me—nay, that was ungenerous: I give them in any case.

And if you are tired you shall sit and close your eyes, and I'll read. You once said you could listen until I stole your senses and you dozed from sheer drowsy pleasure, as if listening to bees humming over some distant clover-field, both suggesting honied sweetness. I made some verses of that. Your prose makes all my poetry! There is no prose more! Life is a golden book, and the letters of the poem it holds are magic runes, with colours and fragrance and melody, so that the reading is everlasting delight, and the subject is eternally old and ever new—just love, love, love!

X

DEAR GOOD LITTLE MAN,—I wonder why we call the thing that is dear to us little, with entire disregard to its bulk or solid qualities? for in truth your proportions are considerable. Quaint person of surprising gravity! You take me much more seriously than I do myself; but then I have lived so long in my own company that I know the incursions of the gipsy spirit, the imp of the unexpected, the vagaries, the pitfalls the *third* fellow in there may set for me.

You ask me some pertinent and inquisitorial questions about things I wrote in my last letter. Of course I did not mean, in saying one should be a law to oneself (that was, I suppose, the gist of what I *did* say, I can't remember) that one has not to heed certain broad unchartered principles of right and wrong, based on the well-being of the whole community, principles, by the way, instinctive in ourselves. These one

has got to stick to. But there is a whole code of morals and manners, mere concessions to social expediency, sheer selfish by-laws which one can safely throw overboard, regarding them merely as ballast, only of use to keep one's ship steady, until one has learnt to take in one's own special cargo.

Why should you or I accept any man's *ipse dixit* as final? If he is an authority on some special subject about which you know nothing, listen to him with respect, because he may be right; and, in any case, you don't know enough to contradict him; but take no man's opinion on questions of right or wrong for you individually, on subjects of which you have ample opportunity in your daily life of framing your own judgment.

Civil laws, communal laws, indeed laws of all kinds founded in other times, when another spirit was dominant, and the spiritual and material needs of men were different, make law too often a caricature of equity. The English marriage law, for instance, is based on Canon law, with amplifications in deference to the entailing of property; is therefore a hardship on a large portion of the community who look

upon marriage purely in the light of a civil contract; and a still smaller, but intelligent, section who only accept it at all as a means of legitimatising their offspring. You don't believe, and I don't believe, that any legal tie would make a marriage between you and me moral or immoral. Our love for one another can alone do that.

This brings me back to the one point upon which I always insist: the necessity of absolute freedom in married life if one is not to stagnate or not to slide backwards. The curse of the whole system is, of course, the fact of making a condition based on mutable feelings subject to immutable laws. I can conceive a situation in which a question of right for you might be wrong for me, and *vice versâ!* and in that case I think each would have to respect the conviction of the other, and give up opposition. It is possible to think a man a most complete idiot for doing a certain thing, and yet to respect him the more for doing it. The horror of certain marriages is when either the man or the woman vampires the other for some end of his or her own. Always a selfish one!

I don't know if you have ever seen a sensi-

tive, finely strung man with the fatal spot of weakness in him—for weakness can be a great deal more widespreading in disaster than sin—goaded into unworthy actions by a wife tuned all along the line to coarser issues—spurred on by sheer terror of her railing voice and the impending domestic "scene" to all sorts of courses alien to his sense of honour—almost his sense of right; prepared to do anything, sacrifice anything for a measure of peace. I have. A slow moral suicide—the destruction of two souls, and a frightful example for the eyes and ears of the small issue, ever on the watch for cause and effect.

One can forgive a good deal if one loves a great deal. That is why love, I take it, must be the keystone of every union—but there is no guarantee of love lasting. You and I like to believe that this wonderful something which draws us together is for all time and all eternity; neither of us could swear to that, dear, and because I know that I insist always, as, indeed, you do in even fuller measure, on each of us keeping our individual freedom. You can be no law for me, nor I for you—what is right for you, you must do even at the cost of pain to me.

You asked me if I thought it would do for every one to think so individually. Yes, if they are advanced enough to do it, and prepared to pay the cost. You don't suppose I imagine every man is equal? "All men are equal in the sight of God" has always struck me as one of those shibboleths that are an insult to the Omniscient—unless we take it in the sense that to get to the root of all things is to discover the absolute relativity of good and evil, and the awesome idea that if you delve deep enough the conviction must arise that white and black are the same thing, only the action of the light is different.

I don't think our Hooligan is much above the level of a human hog, and he is a long way below the level of an intelligent dog with unspoiled natural laws to govern his (moral?) instincts. I am as far from believing that as I am from believing that every woman I meet is as intelligent as I am myself, or from thinking you of a piece with any chance man in the street.

I owe no man nor woman any respect for accidents of birth and position; I bend my head in no homage other than to the great

artist, who is the only genuine aristocrat, because his congenital gift is unpurchasable, and not to him if he debases it for any sordid reason; or to the individual who has fought his way to a complete realisation of the best in himself. I am not a little bit humble, dear love. I would not change with any one who ever lived or lives. I have gained more entertainment, in a more chequered existence than you yet know of, in watching the efforts of folks to impress me with themselves or their belongings. I can explain best what I mean if I say that I would have gladly bent a knee to our late Cardinal Manning when a genuflection to the Papal toe would be a sheer impossibility. Because, in the one instance, I would, from my knowledge of the facts of his life, have elected the man saint by my own suffrage; in the other I would be bowing merely to the elected one of other men's suffrages, men of whose fitting qualification for the position of electors I have no means of ascertaining, therefore my homage would be perfunctory—a dishonesty to my inner sense of honesty.

I could never be loyal to a king merely because he was king. I could die for him if he

were an honest king, working hard for his salary, and the representative of the principles of government I chose myself to adhere to: the loyal servant, in fact, of me and my fellows. But I could serve a cobbler equally, were he chosen worthily to sit on the throne as the head-piece of the state machinery. I am entirely lacking in sympathy for dethroned monarchs, whose subjects have thought fit to dethrone them—as monarchs; though I could give them all my sympathy as persons unfortunate enough to forfeit their position in life—in the same way as I could feel sorry for a laundress if her landlord were to seize her mangle.

I have stood in a crowd often, and tried to see if I felt any thrill at the passing of royalty, but an honest analysis always resulted in the knowledge that, given flags, music, and shouting people, the thrill that a common enthusiasm sends to every individual in a crowd, one might feel the same if the carriage were empty and royalty only an abstraction.

I must send this if you are to get it the usual day, and I love better to think you will be glad to have it than make it more precious to you by delay, and I lay aside all arguments,

and just say, Love me, love me as I do you, for that is the most essential thing in the world for me. Being a woman, just the way my chosen man loves me is of more importance than what all the great men of the earth are saying sagely in the cabinet councils. I love you, be sure of that—tenderly, truly, dearly, proudly, humbly, as sweetheart, wife, mother, and friend, in all the sweetest ways of loving.

XI

YOU DEAR GOOD MAN THING,—How nice of you to send me those books! I promise myself a delightful evening. I always tear the heart out of a book first, then go back and read it all over again and dwell on it in places. Books are like friends: when one is young one loves them so ardently, seeks them with ever new eagerness, but as one gets older and more "detached" and more disillusioned, they become more and more what friends become: conserves on the world's bread—but never bread itself; *that* one has to bake for oneself out of wheat of one's own growing. One has backed too many of friendship's bills not to realise that there, too, one has to pay one's "shot" and one is lucky if one has kept one soul to share one's books and one's fireside. A sting of rheumatism reminds one that one's Alp-soaring ventures are best undertaken from an armchair.

ROSA AMOROSA

In early days books were the "open sesame" to realms of adventure, and one always played the part of hero or heroine in all one's wanderings. But as age creeps on one grows sceptical of Romances, having seen the reverse of the medal of too many ventures. One's critical faculty displaces one's ardent fancy—and so one becomes more and more an interested spectator. Perhaps this explains why one likes memoirs and letters, the actual record of actual lives and events—except when one becomes really a child again and lets oneself run the whole length of fancy's chain into lands of fairy lore. You have the right instinct about books. You are able to divide them into literature and those which are merely books.

I can look back with delight to books I read as a child-girl, and can remember how I used to save up to buy some especially coveted volume. Strange to think how you, too, an ugly little laddie misunderstood as you fancied, were conning stolen books in your land of eternal snows, to meet me some day at the point of the angle.

I can recall a wonderful weekly boy's paper with fine rough illustrations; they were drawn by a marvellous artist in moments of semi-

sobriety and were worth a hundred modern photogravures; for if one cared to see how it was done—I did in those days—one could see the soul and the intention of this individual draughtsman at the back of each penstroke. I used to stop under lamp-posts all the way home and snatch golden moments in the progress of these marvellous tales of adventure. Jack in the tale was a slender, exquisite, golden-haired stripling, like the leading lady in my first pantomime in the old Theatre Royal. A German fairy tale appeared each week, too, with the delightful and quaint original woodcuts.

Your reading was strange for a lad, little of adventure or fairy tale, the sombre introspective heart studies of your own wonderful writers. You must teach me to read Turgenieff and all the others. I will find out for myself, as I always do, those who have escaped advertisement; but whose lays are none the less good to listen to, when they echo one's own heart whispers with a new note of joy or sorrow in the intonation.

It is rather wonderful that you know so many of our best writers, not in the least wonderful that they are more or less old—

mostly dead. But you must not ask me to send you modern novels that deal with the actual facts of English life and which will give you a faithful concrete picture of the great cosmopolitan drama as played in our "little village" every day. No publisher would accept a veracious study of any phase of the life of, perhaps, the wickedest, most complex city of any time.

You will ask me what has the publisher to do with the *writing* of books? Surely he is only or ought only to be the middleman between author and public—that the writer ought to be the judge of what to write and how to write it. You lose sight of the fact that in England everything is run, even law and religion, on trade principles. Book writing is in itself a trade rather than a vocation if the writer has to live by his output. The publisher is forced to be a tradesman, however cultured a gentleman he may be in private life. For instance, if a client afflicted with an artistic conscience come to him about a pre-arranged book and says pitifully: "It is not working out quite as we discussed it, it is running away with me!" he will be forced in the interest of his business to reply: "That is a fact I do not recognise

between the hours of 9 and 6." And he may on reading the MS. return it, saying: "I like it, like it immensely, but I will not publish it. Write a long book, at least 100,000 words, which I can sell at six shillings, and I will accept it at once."

Length and price are factors in bookmaking, though in themselves, as you know, beside the question of quality. His traveller goes round periodically with samples of coming lines of book goods to tout for orders from the country booksellers. These may be quite ignorant men, but they are knowing caterers for the great unlettered British public, who never have learned, and probably never will learn that bookmaking and literature are not the same thing. Then, again, he has to study the prejudices of the bookstall monopolist and the wants of the lending libraries. Every Nonconformist vestryman with a municipal vote can set himself up as a judge of what is proper reading for the intelligence of his district. The newspapers and journals are not entirely free to say what they think in the matter either, for publishers' advertisements play a part in their revenue and free copies for review are cheaply got, are

"stuff" to fill up the ever-growing size of their ventures. The subscribers to the newspapers regulate the fictional freedom of the Press: expediency is the *Lex Heinze* of every branch of life in England.

Neither Literature nor Art is a component part of the life of the people here. The great bulk of the moneyed middle class do not look upon them as in any measure necessary to finer living; and if they have any books in their houses, they will either be well-bound editions of such authors as have become classics by the suffrage of time, and which they have never read or probably forgotten; or such books as are in vogue in Mudie's, or are having a boom in the papers. Of one thing you can be sure in such a house—no book will be judged on its merits as a work of art.

I have heard a foreigner ask with surprise how, with such ingrained indifference to the significance of books as a formative element in life, one can find pictures, and good pictures, and a worthy bit of bronze or engraving in the mansions of the middle class, where there is otherwise a total lack of culture. This is explainable: in buying pictures, preferably those of

men whose works have a rising value, they are investing in a species of "real estate." They have also learnt by tradition, by rote, as it were, to know a little of what is good in a picture. Their grandfathers, when the grand tour was a part of every gentleman's education, went to Italy and got a veneer of the right instinct.

Besides, in the matter of pictures one can give an equivalent for an expert's opinion. The cultivated Hebrew element which has interveined every grade of society in England has done not a little towards the appreciation of painting and music. With literature it is different; there individual taste and an inherent and cultivated discrimination is necessary. A library is more often one of the "correct things" to have, than a living voice in the house of life, a gracious assembly of the shades of the departed mellowed to intercourse by the passage of time.

I have often looked with new interest at some fascinating society woman, who had only struck me as the beautiful shell of a soulless entity, when I have seen her collection of books in her special room. Beautiful editions of beautiful books, first editions and autograph volumes, and others specially bound with her own device

on the cover. Disillusion followed speedily. The remark, that books covered in white vellum or samite, which one must not handle for fear of sullying, were as companionless to me as an assembly of satin-clad waxworks, and that a book with its leaves uncut left me with the same sense of aloofness as the company of a deaf and dumb person, brought out the truth.

The gift of a book is always enhanced for me when the giver severs the pages, and offers it to me with its heart bared for perusal. How well you know me! Even in this little thing you guessed my liking; I would have caressed your dear understanding head for that, had you been near. The uncut pages always irritate me. Have you ever talked with a friend through a prison grating? You can only touch a finger through the intervening wires—that is how they affect me.

To return to lovely madam. A few adroit questions will, in nine cases out of ten, unmask her as an impostor. Her books have no influence on her heart or soul, are neither formative for good, nor restrictive for evil, nor cultivators of beauty or truth. They have neither broadened her tolerance, widened her sympathies, nor

helped her one step on the road to better self-hood. They are just adjuncts to herself, trappings to enhance her fancied value as a fascinating personality; just as the bizarrely shaved monogram on her poodle's loins, or her paragraphed partiality for pierced diamonds or sugared violets.

The best-paid writing man perhaps we have here in England never earned his fame by his worthiest books. If you name to his admirers a few of his subtlest, tenderest, greatest short stories, ask them if they know a wonderful bit of work in which art and humanity shake hands in the tale of two folks called Gadsby, they will shake their heads. For he won his title as Imperial Chanticleer, because he crowed opportunely and expediently in ballads, at a moment when the nation was dozing and the Little Englander was stealing a march! This has another explanation, too.

You must not make the common mistake of the foreigner in considering England merely as a nation of grocers, of territorial aggressors and commercial buccaneers. Don't lose out of sight that amongst all modern nations she has been the cradle-land to the greatest and most varied

poetry. From Chaucer to Swinburne there has always been a singer for a soldier, a rhymester for a huckster. They are profound sentimentalists!

One of the most singular features of this truly extraordinary people is their almost monomaniacal dislike to face facts. They have a fanatical objection to realise unpleasant truths. They will accept a recital of facts in verse which they would burn publicly if issued in prose. It is a species of moral cowardice, entirely unexplainable! It permeates every department in life from the House of Commons to the hospital dispensary. An astute finance minister will never spring the sum total of any bill to be footed by the taxpayers on the nation at once; he knows the national idiosyncrasy too well; he merely tacks on a supplementary estimate; just as the doctor never says cancer—tumour is vaguer and less alarming. I am not jesting; this meets one at every turn. If by any trickery of translation Alving's mental decay could have been made to spring from, let us say, dropsy rather than the disease it did; there would never have been any objection to the production of Ibsen's ghosts.

There are good books, delightful books, published now and then, but you are quite right in saying you do not find them amongst the 30,000-edition writers you name to me, and which your booksellers show in their windows because their agent naturally sends them whatever is "going" best. Scrapment literature is the order of the day here; magazines multiply on magazines; photographic illustrations, and second, if not third-rate reading matter; cheapness and mediocrity are the dominant notes. I have rarely, very rarely met any lower middle-class man who had any real acquaintance with literature or real love of books as things of value in life. Abroad I have. I remember once having to stay at a poky hotel in Rhineland for two days. Remind me to tell you that adventure some day. Indeed, we shall not be dull for want of matter; I have as many tales as the Princess Scherazade, and I promise you I will soften the painful and tone down the harsh points, and silver-gild them with the humour which lurks everywhere if one seek for it; because I have seen that tender heart of yours show its sensitiveness to suffering all too plainly.

Well, to go back. It poured with rain; one window of the long bare room looked down a straight road with skeleton trees on each side running into a leaden horizon, the other into a clay-bedded garden with ragged shrubs and forlorn-looking iron tables in front of a wire arbour with the skeleton of some summer climbing plant crawling over it like a tangle of desiccated snakes.

In desperation I began to talk to the waiter. He knew every book I knew in his own tongue, and many I did not. He brought me a beautiful edition of Heine and two books of his own favourite writer, a South German Jeffries, who wrote exquisite studies of life and love in the Austrian Tyrol: his name I have forgotten, and his books I have never seen since. He begged to be permitted to make the *gnädiges Fräulein* comfortable. So he closed the shutters, filled the stove with firewood, put a footstool under my feet, and lent me not alone his books, but his reading lamp. I gave him, when I left, the only book I had in my bag, a little leather-bound early Keats, and it was eminently characteristic of his nation, I thought, that he accepted it and a tip with the

same serene, pleasant *Danke schön!* Mind you, I don't think reading as you do is quite good for you. You live too much in your spare time with your books, and too little with human beings. It is not altogether well for you. Reading can become—I have known victims—an insidious disease leading to mental paralysis. Sometimes I think it is the Nemesis of the dead writers.

Best of lovers, you who are my book-marker, pointing to the most golden pages in my special volume of life, I have not written one kind, tender line in all this tiresome letter. The day had a little to do with it; it has been mild, not to say muggy and grey, but to-day there is a nip of frost, pleasant as the slight taste of salt frosting on almonds, and it has cleared my head, given me a tonic feeling. You know such moods of mine, for have you not said to me: "You are aloof, my elf, spinning reasonings. You do not need my caresses: I must wait with patience until you tire and come back to me!"

One mistake you make, dear heart! I am never away from you. To know you near is pleasure, even though, as you say, I sometimes

like to be to myself for hours at a time. Yet be sure, entirely sure, that if each fresh day is a new page in my manual of life, your name and the thought of you, and the desire for you, runs as a purple and gold thread between each newly written line. I would like to sit quietly near you this evening, and be silent or let you talk to me, for you have a marvellous and delightful and deliciously flattering way of introducing me, however foreign I may be to the subject of discourse; like the lozenges and devices of exotic nature with which the old monks used to beautify their offices.

I can smile, oh so tenderly, when I think of how you made me figure in serious talks of Russo-Finn policy, commercial expansion, and possible openings for a young man of keen vision in Siberia. The very inflections you gave to the utterance of my name, when you paused to see if I were listening, and not off on a broomstick ride cloudwards to chase some elusive fancy of my own; were scrolls and intricacies and marvellous dottings of gold and silver and gem work in the sober text. Well, the whole book is yours! What troubled you, heart mine? Your last letter was short, and had

a restless note in it. May I not know, love, not out of curiosity, but because I might help?

P.S.—I come back. Stand quite still, and I will caress you in my own way. You have just the dearest chin in all the world.

XII

MY VERY, VERY, VERY DEAREST! MY GOLDEN-TONGUED LITTLE MAN,—You ask me so many questions, you give me no space to tell the beads of my rosary of love to you! I suppose it is natural that you want to hear what I think, and why I think it, for, indeed, as you say when together we are only conscious of one thing: our wonderful love, the dancing threads of light running from soul to soul, the rare delicate feeling of complete well-being, of restful content in one another's nearness; the strange, never-to-be-forgotten marvel of having found and being found, so that the problem of ourselves dwarfs all the facts of life into insignificance; so that even our actual every-day selves and our ideas and opinions never appear in the foreground. And when we think over the hours we were together, we realise that we had never once got beyond the theme of our-

selves and our love and our content at being together.

You ask, referring to my last letter, why I thought you read too much, why I consider that reading may become a vice. It is always difficult to take up the threads of any argument where one has left off; there is a change in the venue of one's thoughts, as it were; and I want to talk of quite other things, to say how pleased I was when you said that the soul of me, the delight of prisoning my wayward spirit when it flitted to you in passing was not enough, but that you desired the hands and hair and throat of me, that you could not do without a single remembered scrap of me, and you remembered everything, even to the little mole under my left ear. By the way, I cricked my neck trying to discover it. Nice thing! You are an ideal lover, for you "say things"! Do you know a woman doesn't value the deepest, most unselfish love if it is silent. The man who tells her *why* she is just the sweetest thing in the world to him, even if the biggest part of his love is in the telling, holds the key to her favours; where a Titan silent in a sea of perpetual sacrifice and devotion merely bores her and sends her

fancy flitting to the possibility of having the things she desires to hear voiced by some one else. She has a weakness for love by word of mouth.

One of the reasons why marriage is so often as dull reading as a last year's calendar is because man won't see the necessity of constantly renewing the dates. Were he wise, he would do it as a matter of policy. There's not much satisfaction in wearing a new frock in the back garden of a blind asylum. You see I have a fair share of all kinds of weakness, my little golden-tongued Chrysostom! with your knack of making one feel precious from the curl on one's forehead to the buckle of one's shoe. Practically that is the secret of happiness; to anoint one's eyes with fairy dew and see all realities through fanciful spectacles.

I am talking of myself again, and you would have me talk of you. Well, it was in this way I meant it. To a man of your temperament—actively indolent, if I may so call it, for you really only labour to procure yourself an hour of supineness; introspective, strongly receptive, lacking in initiative because you are always more inclined to play the spectator than fill a *rôle* in

the drama—it may easily happen that all your enthusiasms, all your impulses will dry-rot, as you will never act on them.

Reading fosters your idiosyncrasies; whilst you can lose yourself in the contemplation of the great upheavals in history, watch the struggles of the world's great men, conjure up visions of the world's fairest women, controvert, analyse and rearrange events in accordance with your own conception of them, without the trouble of even taking your pipe out of your mouth; you will never be up and doing, from a desire to work, not merely from a sense of duty.

It becomes more and more difficult, in a world where Hustle is the password, for any one to lead an absolutely contemplative life. To make one's mark even faintly, initiative and action are necessary. In spite of co-operation and Trades Unions and Syndicates for everything under the sun, there has perhaps never been a time when individual initiative or personality has a greater chance of making itself felt. It is in our day that one can see the strange spectacle of one man, a mere commoner, hoodwinking the legislators of a nation and leading a great people by the nose; hurling them from a state of un-

paralleled prosperity into a vortex of uncertainty, into war, taxation and international difficulties. In the inexorable usury of time one has to pay for all one's mistakes with compound interest.

The balance of power has never been in the hands of the people, never will be: it lies in the man who tips the scales—and some one always tips the scales. Even those who have pleaded most strenuously in the latter half of the moribund century for socialism and communism, are beginning to realise that all socialism founded on an idea of equality is a mere *fata morgana*—that the ideal socialism can never be reached except through individualism; that the more absolutely individual, ay, even egoistic, in principle a man is, the less dependent on his fellows, the more able to hoe his own row, the more nearly does he approach the ideal unit of a socialistic community.

Absolute equality there never will be as long as the beggar in a ditch may beget a strong man with ideals, a man-mover who can sway the destinies of his fellow men by a stirring ballad, a gleaming sword or some strenuous appeal to the religious instinct in all men's souls, or if he be a schemer by appeals to their self-interest;

and the duke with a flawless pedigree father an inanity, whose living or dying is of no more moment to the bulk of humanity than the rotting of one pea in a crop of fifty acres. The greater the number of individuals in a state who can think, act and get a decent living in accordance with their individual demands on life; the more nearly will that state reach the ideal of the best socialism.

You cannot afford to let reading become a vice with you, an insidious disease, wasting your energies. The brain mildews quickly from disuse. I say a disease, for I have known many victims. Every country town with a lending library has women patients. They pay a penny a volume, and read steadily through book after book. They never have any clear idea of any book, any writer's style or any thinker's aim. They have sometimes, when the reading habit has grown on them, to choose a more solid book because no other happens to be in. They mix up the characters and the plots in the most amazing manner, and if you are malicious enough to cross-question them with a seemingly casual interest; they will fail to see why you find anything humorous in the assumption that Mr.

Causabon was the man with the leg in the Egoist, or that Oakhurst was not the family name of the gentleman called John by Miss Charlotte Young.

I am quite proud of you for being able to read Meredith; you *are* rather wonderful in a way. I remember your amazement, when you confessed to me that the front page of "Richard Feverel" was beyond your understanding, at my reply: "So it is of mine! you can't read Meredith and parse him; you've got to read him as you do a book in a foreign language, by flash-lights of intuition!"

Reading to these women I speak of becomes a sort of daily drug, and gradually takes the place of exercise, household duties, indeed active interests of any kind; until their will becomes paralysed by disuse, their judgment fuddled, and their whole mentality a mere sieve for the sifting through of indiscriminate reading matter; of which not a grain remains behind to take root and be perhaps the germ of some independent idea or individual opinion.

You will not thank me for cataloguing you with this class of book bibbers, and I do not actually, only relatively. I have to cry 'ware

dictionaries! they are my form of the danger; glossaries are absolutely infectious. The peasant words (do you remember how we used to try and find exact equivalents?) always give the moods of their own nature more intimately than any of the accepted dictionary terms. In Buckinghamshire here they say so prettily to go flowering, wooding, and bluebelling; and the other day, when I gave a little lad with violet-grey eyes—because, oh foolish me! because they reminded me of yours!—a penny, his mother said: "There, thank the lady, Tommy, for giving you a penny to buy 'palates.'" Funny, isn't it, they call any kind of sweet a "palate"? Yours, I fancy, masquerade in the guise of metaphysics and disquisitions on systems of philosophy.

All roads lead to Rome! But, as your career lies in another direction, I cannot but see with some alarm your tendency to let time run by, whilst you watch life from a coign of vantage in an armchair with a book. In thirty years hence, yes, but not now. You know how anxious I am for you to be yourself and entirely yourself, how loth I am to interfere with your individuality, but in this case I speak because

you yourself ask me to tell you why I thought there lurked a danger for you. You have many qualities to make a man of mark, but interwoven in the very warp of your soul is a mystic black thread leading to gloomy places, where dark spectres lay wait for you, and drag you into pessimistic brooding. Some forbear was answerable for it, I suppose; perhaps the great grandmother who spent her girlhood amid the horrors of famine and pestilence and serfdom, and carried the tragedy of it in her face ever afterwards.

I believe there is something in me, in the touch of lightsome dare-devilry that is ever ready to dart out, even in my gravest moments; in my fearless curiosity, and not a little philosophy of a vagabond sort, which is a set-off against this strain in you. I always know when the shadow of it is stealing over you, and up to this when I have been with you I have been able to chase it away!

Do you recollect once I went to look for you, and found you sitting with your hands thrust deep in your pockets? You looked up as I came in, but never stirred, and I framed your face in my hands and forced your eyes to

meet mine, and gazed at you steadily. You said afterwards that a smile grew in my eyes, and played about my mouth, and worked into your very blood, so that you felt warm and glad all at once, as if you had suddenly come out of some cold damp place into glowing sunshine, with a vital, tonic quality in every ray. You could not know the strange exultant joy which the sense of my own power gave me, as I watched the light answer in your eyes, and the boyish, almost *naïve*, relief grow in them.

And I wiled you to take me to a farce in the winter gardens. You remember how we laughed, and how we laughed at our simple supper afterwards, and even when we said good-night; you came back to embrace me again, because the bubbling laughter in us both had made it seem less sweetly serious a ceremony than usual; for we have neither of us, I think, ever got over the wonder, almost awe, which the consciousness that more than our lips meet gives us, the feeling that it is as if something in our senses is listening for the meeting, the mating of some inner spirit selves, which become one in such moments as that. I woke

hours afterwards, and broke the quiet of my room with a ripple of merriment. I wondered if you were smiling in your sleep, and I turned my lips to where I always like to think of your dear head resting.

I wonder have I said one thing in all this incoherent letter to explain why I want you to go out more, to mix with laughing youth, to catch joy from smiling eyes, to snatch a tune from lilting lips. I believe in a dose of frivolity at times to leaven the seriousness of modern life. A good musical comedy plays the part of a feather broom in a cobwebby library full of serious tomes. It scatters the dust, and makes the title to all kinds of subjects clear.

I remember once when very young being shocked at the saying of a wise old man, that a measure of gentlemanly debauch was good for a man's soul. I think now he was right; indeed, if one knows anything of the horrible imaginings of mediæval monkish literature, one cannot but think they would have been cleaner and better, committing themselves in all honesty to what some one calls "le huitième péché capitale" woman. You can't measure your own strength nor weakness until you test it on

your fellow men—and women. Now that is generous of me!

It is curious when one considers how important an educative part men and women play in each other's lives at all stages of their development, how opposed most husbands and wives are, as a rule, to allow each other a degree of freedom in their friendships.

I believe you are a jealous little creature. I hope you will have self-respect enough never to let me see when you are. You are all the world, just all the whole world to me as the *stadtholder* of my heart and destiny, but you are not all the world in intelligence and experience, and as a buffoon you are below consideration. I trust you will take a nice, non-emotional interest in many charming women, for I am tremendously interested in a comfortable, unemotional kind of way in any number of men. You must not curl up in yourself again. I can feel it in your letters. I know if I were near I could rouse you, but I want you to be independent of me—because, just because I love you as I do. I kiss your dear eyes, and I wait for your answering caress, you love of the world, you maker of my heart's music!

XIII

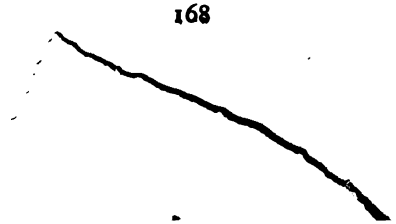
In Bed.

"A good Sunday to my dear Mistress!" It sounded so quaintly, sweetly old-fashioned! It cannot but be a good day when I have your dear words to read. I am ill, dear; but do not worry, I shall get all right; I wired because I knew you would be anxious at not hearing as usual. All my nerves are vibrating like the tuning-up of an orchestra—scraping, screeching, without knowing to what all the noise is to be a prelude. It promises to be the overture to an Inferno. When it is like this with me the pain becomes audible, as it were, and has colour —a purplish-yellow colour, I always fancy. It would be rather like the loops of electric light in a globe, if they had sound as well as light and quiverment. By the time you get this I hope I shall be better.

I want you to have this on your name-day,

although I am afraid my head will not echo my heart-wishes in the way I desire, for it is all occupied in listening to the devil-dance in my back. There was a thunderstorm last night; I lay awake and listened. Thor was casting thunderbolts; the crown of a great tree near the house crashed down. There is a madly exhilarating quality in a storm like that, although something, electricity, I suppose, in the atmosphere always gives me pins and needles, and if I have any nerve-pain, intensifies it. The wind howled and rushed and swept the earth, and converted the corner of the world about me into a huge sounding-board, evoking all the echoes in the world, mighty voices calling out of the darkness, spirits of desolation with the laughter of furies.

I could hear bells—where do they come from, the bells and voices in the storm-chants? They were like the tolling of buoy-bells at sea, calling up visions of sinking ships; irregular, despairing knells and chanting wind-voices, intoning misereres; tortured wails, the heart-cries of the world's harlots condemned to solitude by the world's virtuous; the bass notes of men's voices pleading in remorse for *assoilziement;* the shrill



sobs of deserted babies—and through it all a steady downpour of rain. Sudden gusts that ripped the air as the tearing of giant sails, then a long ominous lull—silence—terrifying by contrast. I felt once as if I were becoming light-headed; the lightning was shooting like the flash and falling of comets inside my head, and I half dozed, and the great old four-poster bed sailed out through the window and swung in circles on the wind blasts; I could see myself a speck in the waste of clothes, with the curtains spreading out like sails, and hundreds of faces, some forgotten years and years ago, others totally strange, peered at me out of the darkness with features luminous as with phosphor.

Then you came, and you leant down and took both my hands in the way you actually do, and I fell asleep. Now the world has a clean, tear-washed countenance, and the strange serene expression that comes after an outbreak of grief. The church bells are ringing from the villages; I can see the fields through the open window, and a glorious panorama of clouds. Wonderful galleons and chariots, thrones and Titanic faces, grand unconscious effects, as if the wind, that supreme artist, is modelling them at random.

I often see things written in the clouds; sometimes a face appears, the face of some one I have not perhaps seen for years, glad, it may be, or stricken with grief, just staring at me; and I never fail to hear of him or her, or to run against them shortly afterwards.

Once, it was a hot July day, with a vast expanse of blue-white sky absolutely cloudless; I was sitting on the porch-step talking to a friend, telling her a story. Suddenly a feeling of oppression clutched me, a sense of chill; I looked up and saw a black cloudlet sailing nearer. It held my gaze because it was so singular in its solitude and intensity in the serene blue of the sky. It came nearer; I went on talking. Then it stopped right in front of us, hung poised, then shivered and changed and formed itself into a sharply defined coffin, as clearly outlined as if it were deftly cut out of black paper. I looked at my friend; she, too, was staring at it; I stopped speaking. "What is it?" I asked. She said, "How strange; it is a coffin!" "Yes," I said; "a sign for either you or me," and I marked the date on the calendar, and three weeks afterwards the news came of a brother's sudden terrible death on that date.

If you were here I might rest, for there is a soothing quality in your nearness, rest in your touch always, although you quicken every sense to keener life in me. All my life in my moments of greatest pain I have experienced mentally greater lucidity of thought, more keenness of analysis, have been more alert in recording impressions. Twice when I have gone perilously near the border river, and was physically unable to speak, I have felt in myself acutely conscious of everything about me, and the processes taking place in myself.

I wonder would it not aid medical science if people were to note the things that are always the warning heralds of physical disturbance to come in them, as they do the signs of atmospheric change ? No two people have, perhaps, quite the same, although I cannot quite believe that ; probably people would fall into groups, subject to like experiences.

Ever since I was a tiny child one thing has been the beginning of illness for me : the forming of marbles of certain colours into pyramids, in time to the beat of a clearly defined measure. Each time the pyramid is completed, the last marble forming its apex drops down the centre,

and it all begins again. As a child it used to terrify me; there was a strange horror in the rhythm of it; I can remember heart-broken, anguished prayers to God not to let those marbles come. Now as a grown woman I can shake it off, but it is always a cry of "'ware hawk" all the same. If the rhythm of those moving marbles begins to tap in my head, in a train or steamer in time to the piston, I know the journey is telling more than it ought.

I know some one else who always stays in bed and rests absolutely whenever she is subjected to the visitations of faces and masks of surpassing loveliness, beaten out of all shades of gold, which come to her in the dark when she closes her eyes for sleep. They are *her* danger-signal. The highest form of sanity is, maybe, the clear consciousness that insanity is merely twin brother. Humanity suffers from a too great garrulity about all the petty externals of life, and too great a reticence as to what takes place in that awsome place, the individual soul. Women could tell more than men, but doctors are obstinate folks. Tell a nerve specialist, if you are his patient in a house, that you cannot rest, that you toss and dream because your bed

lies east to west, that to procure calm restful sleep it must be placed due north and south, and he will smile indulgently; but he won't have your bed moved, unless he happens to feel that way himself. The great all-healer, the wonder-man of medicine of the future, will be the man who will recognise that his diagnosis must begin with the *soul* of his patient, and not too seldom, if she be a woman, the sex of *that*. The two callings who are told most lies in the world, or at least more half-truths, are those of the priest and the doctor.

I wish, I wish, I wish you were here—everything, all the tiresome thoughts and wearisome fancies would vanish, and it would be just well with me. I want you more than ever I have done before; and in saying this I say more than you can fathom, for it has always been my way to go away by myself in hours of pain or trouble, and not show my face to friend or acquaintance until the struggle was over. You have repealed all the laws which have governed my life, made me just a weak dependent atomy whenever my love for you comes into play.

Some kindly spirit must have leaned over your shoulder and prompted you to write all

the tender great things in that last letter of yours. I kiss your dear hand, and if you were here I would cuddle up to your breast and say, "Smooth my head and soothe me to sleep, love," not alone for the sake of the love which is in you for me; but because I am no longer anything but the expression of a great absorbing, all-enveloping love for you. You have condensed this world for me into the compass of your enfolding arms.

I am very, very tired; I feel a very miserable morsel of humanity, and yet I cannot help half laughing at myself. If you come to think of the immense world of men outside, entirely ignorant of the woes or love-throes of a small person in a four-poster; so insignificant an atom as to import less than the fate of an aphis to the sum total of the growth of the world's roses, or one parasite of still more microscopic size on the said aphis. And yet—yet my need of you is more tremendous than all the needs of the universe. The universe is just you and me. Love me, love me, love me! I need it!—Longingly your little R. A.

XIV

My Heart's Love, My King of Men,—Master weaver of the fabric which makes life golden! In a letter I cannot thank you for your last letter, indeed perhaps I could not do so adequately in words. You mistake a little if you think I am giving myself to you blindly; I am yours in obedience to something fine, and vital, and unexplainable in myself. To know why one loves any one person more than another would be to cease to love them! Why I am more than all the world to you, and you are more than all the world to me, ay, the only one in the world for me, must ever remain a mystery; that is the pith of its strength when all is said and done. But beyond this, I am not yours unreasoningly; I am sure of myself, sure of what I want in life, sure of what you can give me, and better still, sure of what I can give you!

You beg me not to believe that you can give me an adequate return for the "great unselfish devotion" I express for you. Heart's desire, am I then a huckster in the things of my soul? A nice observer of current values in love, to dole out my affection by scale-measure in return for board, lodging and—a man? You are more humble than you ought to be; you say you wish to be as I wish to have you, and I say I wish you to be yourself—your best self. It is you with your faults—you have not a few—as much as your good qualities who are dear to me.

If I ever wish to change you, it is from no selfish motive, but rather because I see that you will suffer in your career, your power over men, your influence as a citizen in your own state, by the preservation of certain attributes. In such matters I would wish to help you to change yourself.

If I maintain that a woman is better employed in handing pegs to a cobbler she loves, and who satisfies the heart-needs of her peculiar nature, than in turning out misfits in foot wear on her own account; I do not in the least think of her as of secondary importance, a mere handmaid

of the cobbler. But I believe that if she helps him to drive the pegs straighter, fires him with the ambition to be the best cobbler in his district, she has done more for the foot-wear of humanity than if she had set up a rival establishment of her own.

Outwardly woman has always seemed the more enslaved half of humanity; inwardly she has always been the more free. Whereas a man in the essence of him has always drawn either his strength or weakness from her, she has remained in her very essence unchanged, entirely uninfluenced by him, merely dependent on him for externals. For this reason ever an enigma to him! Whilst he has been laboriously building up legal, social and moral systems, strait waistcoats for his own enslavement; woman, the eternal anarchist, has as systematically nullified his efforts, and upset his logical calculations; perhaps the new era will mean that for the first time they will work together. No, if I gave myself to you, dearest one, I do it with open eyes. If I stand as a child before you, if I obey you willingly, it is not because I live in any awe of you, or fear you as a master; I have never met any man stronger

than myself in every way. The superiority was always purely relative—if he were greater in one direction, I was in another, and his mere brute force could always be circumvented by strategy. No, I obey you because I choose to, because it gives me pleasure to own you master —in behest to the love in me; I like you to take heed of me; your protection is pleasant; but I *can* stand on my own feet, if needs be. If I play the subordinate it is because my heart has elected you king.

But, make no mistake, were you to presume on your prerogative and wish to play despot, I should dethrone you with a like promptitude. You are my king because I choose you out of the world of men; you are my master because it is my pleasure to obey you. I choose you quite as much as you choose me, because with you, and you alone, life will be the whole I desire it to be. I have no wish to be your rival in your life's work, but equally I would resent interference with mine. Whilst I respect your opinions, your prejudices, I expect equal tolerance on your part for those I have. Where you are weaker I shall be glad to lend you of my strength, where you are stronger I would

beg of you to give me of yours. Where you are smaller I would gladly try to remedy the deficiency by whatever might be greater in my own nature and *vice versâ*. If to laugh with you is just the gladsomest thing in God's good blundering world, it does not on occasion hinder me from laughing at you ; nor do I resent your taking a like liberty, for indeed a sane man will always find subject for mirth in his woman-kind.

I don't want to be like you nor any man, except in such ways as I might imitate you with advantage to myself ; your code of honour with one another, your *esprit de corps* is worth taking a lesson from. I have no exaggerated idea of subservience : you are my world, just dearer to me in your ugliness, with your weaknesses and your whims, than all other men put together. I would sooner share a crust with you than feast daintily with any one else, but don't run away with the idea that I mean you or I to be content with " seconds " as sold by the world's bakers. I am not a modern woman for nothing.

If your will is weak, mine is not. You can use it as a crutch to strengthen yours ; if you

lack initiative, I have it in plenty. If I know myself rightly I shall only be content to stay at home as a storage of reserve force from which you can draw the wherewithal to go out and fight anew for our share of the world's cream. If you are ill, disheartened, I can nurse you back to strength and courage. If you were to lose heavily at the game of life, it might be a good thing to know that one soul would understand and see clearly where possible to make a fresh start. If you were to be stoned in the market-place I might take my share of the punishment, for a woman's love at any time is courage in its highest potency.

Have you an enemy you cannot crush, let me see if I cannot circumvent him. But not, and this is what I want you to understand, not out of any old-fashioned idea of womanly submission or meek endurance; but because alone or in rivalry to you I am half a creature; with you I can see my way to be a whole. No, because I love you, and out of deference to the love in myself, by the strength and insight and self-assurance which the consciousness of having found the best and greatest thing in life for me, the place I can fill best, and develop myself to

the uttermost. But to compass this there must be reciprocity.

It is no woman's part in life to play the *rôle* of relieving officer for the preservation of wastrels—to heart-starve while she pours the treasures of her nature into a man with the receptivity of a sieve—any more than it is her duty to go on mothering children to an inheritance of disease or insanity. These are matters every thinking woman of to-day must decide for herself, without reference to priest or judge —if she only has courage enough to do so. To see with *your* eyes would be an irreparable loss to me, and not least to you.

Remember I have held my own in life, fought my way in the ranks of the workers—a hateful position for a woman of emotional needs. One may gain admirable bread and butter and go heart hungry as a woman—but it has made it possible for me to choose you. There was a want of logic in the old-fashioned notion that the choice depended entirely on the man—it never did.

Remember that just because I see so clearly and give myself to you so joyfully, so fully, with so complete an understanding of what it

means—I can stretch out my wrists and let you fasten the handcuffs on (every partnership imposes its duties) and delight, because I am a woman, in obeying the behests of the great, glorious love in me—in its essence an entirely different sentiment from that glowing in you for me. You can be sure of being loved in a way undreamed of by the man who gained the exacting (weakness is always more exacting than strength) blind devotion of the old clinging-ivy type of female. There was a spice of malicious humour in the originator of that simile, for given time the ivy kills the strongest tree.

No, dear heart, life will be a good and great thing because all joys will be increased and all sorrows made easier. When you write me a letter such as that last of yours, you lend me double courage, I feel strong enough for any fate. I have a strange protective tenderness for you sometimes, with a wistful note in it. Why? I have never seen any servility in the expression of your need for me. Your weakness is of the kind a woman can strengthen but not hold in contempt; for it is in a measure a part of the most characteristic of your qualities, a facet, oddly enough, of the strongest attributes in you. Your

curious anomalies are owing, I fancy, to the racial crossing in you. You can't have Russo-Finn and Scotch and French ancestors for nothing.

Now never write again and point me out reasons why you are undesirable as a *parti*. It is unworthy of me. All my life I have needed love, needed to love and be loved—but in conformity with an ideal of my own. Men have cared for me—I know, I have not forgotten, you are jealous of every past lover. You needn't be, tyrant! For none loved me as I desired.

One wanted to pop me into a gilt-wired cage, to give him the satisfaction of taming a wild bird, wanted to train me to eat lump sugar out of his hand—he would have given me the best sugar, pure cane, and even an ivory ring to swing in. Another felt I could regenerate him, make a new man of him, imagined he paid me a compliment by offering to allow me to darn the heels of his moral socks; another thought I had all the necessary qualities to get him on in life and entertain him besides in our hours of leisure—their reasons for wishing to possess me were perhaps unconsciously comical.

You are the first to love me as I want to be

loved—because I am just I—for myself without knowing why, and you will never be able to explain either. Because I am just the one woman for you whose physical imperfections are as endearing as another woman's beauty; whose voice is the echo of another voice in yourself, whispering to you since first you thought of woman, whose faults, I never hide them from you, are but a greater reason you say for loving. See how I remember your dear words.

Don't be afraid, sweetheart; love me as much as you will, trust me to find a way to give you back your love with compound interest. We are unlike in so many ways; I know I bewilder you with my sudden changes; you have told me I am like an opal, a thing of milk and fire. That if my lips give utterance to daring ideas which frighten you with their audacity, my eyes smile tenderly as they watch the effect; that my capacity for sitting hours silently has amazed you as much as my capability of tearing a subject to its uttermost shred. That I can draw a white line round myself in vestal moods which you would not dare to cross, or throw my arms round your neck with an abandon which carries you out of yourself, so that you re-feel my

caress for days. That to meet me is always a pleasurable anticipation with a dash of suspense in it, for you know not what my humour may be; but that underneath all my alternations you always find the one unchanging self, one consonant note—and with me in every mood, glad or sad—rest.

Shall I tell you what I find in you? No, I'll keep it for another time, for I have told you so many foolish flattering things already, that you'll be for loving me less by way of a change. Whilst you are waiting you can remember that I *do* think it is worth living and waiting and working just to love you! What I think it worth to be loved by you—ah! well, if you are anxious to hear that you must woo it from me.

XV

My Man of Men, my beloved,—Into what strange place of misconception have you strayed? I am miserable, heart-sick over your last letter. I read it with a sick, helpless feeling gathering in my breast, a kind of paralysis—a sense of gloom as if a cold shadow were settling down over me, shutting out from me all that is good, and glad, and worth living for in life.

Surely you are not going back to all the old doubts, the old tortured self-questionings; I thought we had laid them so that even their ghosts would never rise again to walk between you and me. What have I said or done that you again question the wisdom of our union, your own worthiness, our relative positions? I have told you. How am I to tell you plainly enough? I despair now of words to convey my own settled conviction so that you may understand once and for all, finally, and with

no possibility of misconception, that *your* fate and mine are one, that as long as the sun rises and sets for me, I am yours.

I have not slept, nor eaten, nor rested since I got your letter. My eyes are dry, as if sealed with a film of horn, my head throbs, and I ache in heart and soul and senses. My whole sentient being is one great cry, the cry of a drowning woman going down in the wastes of some place of dark despair! How can you write so again to me? I am glad to have the letter, in so far as it is, as in every letter of yours, a facet struck off red hot in a moment of emotion from the singular whole which makes yourself. Glad in the same way as one might feel a satisfaction in wrenching the dagger away from the grip of one's loved one, even though one cut one's hand badly in the doing; because one knows at least one holds the weapon with which he might have been about to wound himself. Glad that you can let me see every side of your complex nature.

You say you are full of longing, insatiable desire to have me near you, that I am in truth the greatest thing the world holds for you—indeed, your letter is the cry of a tortured heart

turning in spite of itself to the only one who can comfort it. And yet you bid me pause, weigh, consider, bid me examine closely your weakness; think over the morbid strain in you, reflect before I bind my bright spirit to your dull clay. How think? how consider? how reflect?

You bid me think what life will be with you in the solitude of such a place as Vlapostock; paint vividly to me the struggle your life—our life—may be; the dreariness of the one long snow-covered street, the dearth of intellectual food, the remoteness from the world's news. Reiterate to me how I shall lose touch with the throbbing of the great world's heart (Vlapostock is a vein of that, I fancy, fed by the same blood), and how I may find you lacking, how I may weary of you.

You try to tear the rose of our love to tatters, to scatter the petals at my feet, as if I could not feel your hands tremble through your letter, and see the misery cloud your eyes. You hurt me, wound me, sear me, cut me to the quick with your doubts. Take me up close to you, let me wind my arms round your neck, and lay my face to your dear face and tell you—tell you so that

my every accent will carry conviction—what you are to me, what you are doing when you try to make me stray on a fool's quest in search of a freedom I do not desire.

You bid me go again into the world before I leave the world to go to you, and make sure before I decide. Make sure of what, my soul's desire? Can I not make you understand—I thought I had done so—what a marvellous, exquisite thing the coming of love has been to me? You are glad to know, you ought to know; you have seen me leap like a flame to brightness at your touch; have felt me start and tremble like a sensitive steed at the flick of a whip, when you called my name. You have called me yourself, "My flame witch, sensitive as an aspen leaf to a shiver of wind!" How can I tell you? You know how I have whispered to you of dreams, nay, scarcely dreams, visions I often have of places and things I have never seen.

The breaking of the surf over coral reefs in seas where the air breathes spice; the opening of the lotus buds at the whisper of dawn in a world of purple and opal light; the water shimmering in exquisite tranquil beauty; quaint trees

outlined against the peach-gold flush with which the whisper of the coming of the sun has stained the brooding, tender face of the expectant sky —an imperceptible movement, and the cream rose petals unfold and buds become blossoms, and blossoms flower-cups borne on the salvers of their dark green leaves. The dawn of beauty in the flush of morning! Everything lovely I have ever seen in dreams pales into nothingness when I think of how my own soul unfolded at your call—thrilled to an ecstasy which yet held a sense of pain in its intensity.

Do you not realise that you have twined your fingers in the nerve net of my being, entangled my heart strings so that every touch sets me all a-quiver, singing or sobbing until the blood in me listens, as it were, to the harmonies or discords you evoke. You are not absent from my thoughts one second in the day, and you are somewhere in the background and foreground of my dreams at night. If you have made me richer than an empress by the gift of your love, you have made me poorer than any beggar by my dependence on your fidelity. With the hope of being yours I am a living thing; rob me of that and I am as the "masks" in your own fairy

tales : semblances of humanity which dance and show their faces to the world ; but if you steal behind them they are but hollow shells, holding at most cobwebs and dust.

God ! don't think I fail to realise how poor you have made me, as well as see clearly how rich I have felt in the security of your affection. Why torture me ? I am yours with every cell in my brain, every nerve in my body, every fibre of my being ; I am so bitterly unhappy, even sounds jar, every step of the passers-by is pain. The minutes drag like hours ; the night was an eternity ; your words dance in my brain, striking my inner eyeballs with the sting of grit; my food is a subject of loathing.

Oh ! hold me close, close, dear love, close enough to hurt ; say you only try me ; that it is only the doubt of yourself that inspired your letter. If I could not read your love of me through every line of it, perhaps some remnant of the old weak woman's pride might stay me from writing as I do. Yet no ; there I make myself smaller than I am ; if one loves greatly, loves well enough, loves as one holding love above all else in life desires to love and be loved, such husks of a cheap convention fall

away as chaff before the rush of some glorious, strong, health-giving breeze.

No, we two "belong home" together. Without me you will be as poor as I shall be desolate without you. You are my sun, my joy, my torture, my desire, my reason for living at all! I am all worn out with the stress of my sorrow. For Love's sake, my sake, our sake, send me a line at once to reassure me, or I may do something desperate, foolish.

I am dry-eyed, and yet I feel as it tears are trickling steadily somewhere in me, turning my heart to water, wasting my strength, filching my courage. God help me! I am as an image of wax in the grip of a hot strong hand in this hour of my love labour. Come quickly; set me out of my suspense; gather me once again to your embrace, to your heart and your faith in me. Don't think I will let you go, not until I have seen in your eyes that there is no love in them when they rest on my face.

I always thought, when they watched me, of a bee, the way it searches and searches a flower, in and out with eager zest—your eyes used to wander over my poor face, gathering in every trick of expression, every bit of modelling, every

mark or line. I used to feel their tender wistfulness in a way that always made me richer by every item noted. No; I must hear the words of dismissal come through your own lips —then I will go from you without one reproach; what happens then is my affair.

You don't know me yet. Distance means nothing: if there were no way to go to you except by walking, and it were to take me two years to get to you, I would set about it doggedly. Only two things do I recognise stronger than myself—the will of God and the silence of death. I love you with the passion of a woman who has never given of the sacred fire of herself to light any stray passer's pipe, who has never gambled with her heart for pastime, and used her emotions as counters in the game.

There are dangerous depths in me, but come what may, I pray God I shall be big enough, strong enough to do what is best for you! Put me out of my suspense. In sorrow and joy, good days and bad days, time and eternity, I am yours.

My love is like a great flaming torch, by the light of which I can walk through the darkest

way, if only I can see your eyes lit with answering love at the other end. I can laugh at fear, at expedience, that fetich of the common-souled, laugh at danger. God! I know none but the fear of losing you! And I will not lose you, for I have seen that in your eyes which seals you to me.

My love, even in this heavy hour, calls in me like the note of a golden trumpet bidding me fight for it, even with yourself. Strength, what is strength? Measured by muscle, bulk, weight, you could crush me like a moth in your fingers; have you ever done it and felt a shock at the transition of the fluttering, dancing thing into a smear of silver dust? But I have *that* in me, that were I near you, near enough to look in your eyes, to send my voice ringing to your ears, would make me strong enough to whirl you off your feet, to sweep away all your doubts, your fears, your lack of belief in yourself, lack of courage (not uncommon in this surfeited age) to face, to dare all for happiness and love. No wonder happiness is shy, no wonder love is so rare, when they *do* come hand in hand and say: "I am here within your grasp." How seldom do they meet with a soul big enough to stretch

out his arms at once, without hesitation, without questioning, without huckster doubts as to the price to be paid—content to take all risks on the strength of the game.

There, you have my answer! and I am all aglow with the consciousness of the courage in myself; all the tears have dried at the flame in my soul, and if you could see me you would find the old fiery spirit, with what you used to call its glint of disdain at every form of cowardice looking steadily out of my eyes into yours! I am suffering, suffering horribly, but I'd rather suffer a hundred times over than be without love and you. I must know that I have both!

P.S.—Opened this to say just got your dear penitent letter. All right, my own, own, heart's own. I send this all the same, as it will show you the power you have to hurt me. How could you? And because written to you, it belongs to you, as I do.

XVI

My best beloved, my joy-bringer,—It is not my day for coming to you, but the outside world wears such a miserable face, stands cowering under the sodden sky from which the rain falls with sullen persistence, that I want to. Ill-tempered gusts of wind hustle the window frames, shriek wantonly down the chimneys, and whistle round the street corners. A sagging branch of a leafless rose-bush keeps scratching the window-pane, as if some poor soul is seeking furtively to find a shelter from the cheerlessness outside.

In here it is warm, and the firelight is flickering, amusing itself, as a child will, by seeking out all the bright things in the room—the quaint brass handles on the bureau, an old copper lid on a mug, a bit of gold broidery on a cushion in the gloomy nest of the old sofa; the kettle is crooning a song of fire and flame tamed to

everyday use, and the little tea-table is laid for two.

Do you know it is a fad of mine now, when I am quite alone, to set a place for you?—you who are always with me in spirit, and to whom I turn involuntarily when a quaint conceit born of some fancy in the fire, or a sudden fear engendered by some train of thought, or lately read word flits through my mind. It is a day to make it good for two who are *one*, happy indoors together—a day to make home the word to conjure with, and "not at home" the word of closure against every measure of intrusion from outside; a day for the companionship of *one* at one's own fireside!

You ask me in your letter it I shall not regret England, if I will not hanker back to this wonderful country of riches and world-wide culture where everything is on the grand scale.

Dear heart, I will say my "Vale England" with no regrets. It is difficult to make a foreigner understand English life of to-day. To give a reason for the change in manners—by the way, there are none nowadays—the mode of life. To do so would mean a treatise embracing the

law of primogeniture, for the younger sons and their belongings are responsible for much of the snobbery running through every grade of upper middle-class life; the title of an elder brother or even an uncle will provide a score of relations with tin halos of nobility; the "unworthening of all worths" (that is, guaged by any standard of inherent nobility of character, unblemished descent, or the *noblesse oblige* of some fine ideal of life); through the encroachment of the plutocracy by marriage into old families of distinction; the American woman's influence; the so-called gentlewoman's papers; the economic necessity of women working, and a dozen other reasons for the extraordinary state of things prevalent in society. Moreover, there is no England to-day—there is London! monstrous, glorious, complex, delightful, baleful London—a gigantic fungus absorbing all the rest of the land, a land that becomes more deserted every day. A city spreading itself in every direction, stretching out tentacles like some all-devouring polypus, and clawing the best intelligences of all the rural districts into its big black heart! A terrible, fascinating, seductive London in a deserted England. And

when one is in London one is—unless one has money, and much of that—as far removed from the enjoyment of a cultured existence as if one really were in Vlapostock.

The distances are so great as to place a tax on friendship; the soot and dirt so all pervading as to put a premium on cleanliness. The finest drawing-room in London would not stand the test of sunlight in an open field! London! terrible city, in which you can be more desolate than in a corner of the hell of Isolation; more lonely than in some village in the Andes; as far removed from any participation in civilised life, unless, as I say, you have money and much of it, as if you were to spend your days in, let us say, Punta Reinas.

Don't look it up; it is in the Straits of Magellan, and consists of one short row of houses, with a diminutive post-office. It is not at all unlike a village in a Norwegian fiord, with its surroundings of still blue water, its glacier-stretches with sprinkling of snow, steep rocky sides, broken by patches of purple heath, and its divinely restful quiet. There is no country in the world where you can live more uncomfortably on a moderate income, than this of

ours. To live in the country means to starve intellectually, to be "tabooed" socially, if you have a single individual idea or enough self-respect to object to patronage—in fact, to be damnably respectable according to the lights of the parson's wife, means to be respectably damned and commensurably dull according to your own, if you be a citizen of any larger world.

In London—a London of a thousand sets and circles—you can starve in complete comfort, die in undisturbed solitude, and rot at ease, for as long a period as you have paid your rent in advance, unless your decomposition inconveniences your neighbours.

London itself, as an object of abstract analysis, cannot fail to fascinate you if you have the gift of sight—a rarer faculty than is imagined. City of a hundred faces, protean changes! City of gracious charity and sardonic indifference, correct living and rampant vice. Vice that strikes you insolently in the face, and flits by you gay, insouciant, bacchanalian under a glare of electric light in the most public thoroughfares.

With money and a judicious use of advertise-

ment any one can go almost anywhere in English society to-day. Money, dress, and publicity are its three great gods. As society is always made by women, not men, they are possibly at the root of the trouble here too. The papers devoted to their interests never appeal to one ideal, one noble end. Each fresh one starts by blowing a preliminary trumpet and stating that it, unlike its contemporaries, purports to appeal to gentlewomen alone, and is actuated by the highest aims. A column is set apart each week to the dull discussion of some ideal of supposed value to women; and the rest of the paper is given over to fashion plates, face-masseurs, make-up artists, dress, and the chronicles of any one's parties or nobody's weddings for a consideration.

The dress mania has become as much a disease as earth-eating in parts of Australia—it works as a canker through every class of life. It would not matter if it only harmed individuals, but it has grown to be the test-gauge of worth; so that an ordinarily habited body is at the mercy of waiters, servants, shopmen, and all the other flunkeys whom those who ought to know better have taught to judge by externals.

It forces the majority of people to spend their lives in aping to appear better off than they are. Quite struggling professional men's wives make shift to "dress" for a poor late dinner, when a good meal in the middle of the day, and the honest acknowledgment that they cannot afford special gowns for indifferently prepared food at a supposed fashionable hour, would be the honest way out of it. Nothing short of a return to the old sumptuary laws would save things now.

It is the day of shoddy materials and sham jewellery; and the draper perhaps gauges the calibre of the women with most nicety when he sells them moreen, "warranted to rustle like silk." They would wear the winding sheet of a malefactor, or the hempen rope that hanged a matricide, if it could be converted into some fabric that could be bought cheap, have the latest colour ordained by fashion and: "rustle like silk." Cheap and vulgar pretence is the sign-word—no class has escaped it. Women bearing the oldest and proudest names in Britain figure in the illustrated papers cheek by jowl with whistling coons and cake-walk ladies.

Les extremes se touchent. The aristocracy and

the proletariat may save England—her rich, ignorant moneyed middle class has been setting her steadily on the down grade; for over a century they have been studiously learning one thing—the art of "falling soft"—the only art for which they have any particular aptitude. If any great national calamity were to overtake us as a nation, some later-century chronicler of insight will not fail to show that it was the women of to-day who "tipped the balance."

No, my own, I am ready to face Vlapostock! Clothe me in hodden, any road of escape from the dress nuisance here would be a relief. It is not alone a nuisance, but it is an effectual bar to intercourse, since the women have made a dozen liveries a day a *sine quâ non* of visiting them. One would want the dexterity and patience of a quick-change artist to keep pace with their unwritten, but none the less stringent, laws of costuming.

Some quite nice professional middle-class folk invite one to dinner. One goes, but if one adds up dinner-gown, gloves, hansom fares, &c.; the result forces one to see that one is paying three times over for an indifferent, inartistic English meal, somewhat dull conversation, with the price

stinters of the growth of childhood in all its phases, mental, moral and physical; I will tell you.

Every thought I have on the subject was suggested by a little wooden North-countree rocking-chair that occupies a place of honour in a house I know. It doesn't match any of the handsome furniture, for it has a simple wooden frame and ordinary loose cushions—it *did* when it was taken home first, but it has followed the fortunes of its owner's little mistress. It is the only thing I ever coveted from a woman; as a rule I envy none of their belongings, least of all their husbands. It tells its own tale of the steady industrious upward and outward growth of fortune and honoured position from a small beginning. The little rocking-chair was the pivot, odd as it may seem; for the woman who sat and rocked in it, planning the hundred small economies, watching the march of the outward world with sensible, intelligent interest, directing her household wisely, seeing issues shrewdly, sewing her baby clothes; made it a throne round which the whole fabric of a family life centred; the steering-gear of a ship freighted with the fortunes of many. To me it has been more

than an eloquent and suggestive little chair; it has been a symbol of all that is best for woman; a lodestone pointing the way to the possession of true power. The little lady who owns it is entirely unknown in the wider world; no photographer wants the copyright of her likeness, yet it is a query if she has not done more from the empire of her rocking-chair for the growth of humanity than any of the platform speakers. Her influence has been imperceptible but wide-spreading, running off into all sorts of side lines.

You must buy me a chair with the date of my home-coming carved on the back, dear, and see if I will not try to fill my throne worthily. I wish you were here to-night; the fire has burned to a great hollow heart! Nothing is as good as it might be, for I have not you to share it with me. You obsess me; I fancy I can hear your step in the hall, and I wait and the door does not open, and yet I know you *have* come, for I can feel your breath on my neck as you stoop to turn my face round to you; and I know that up there with you, you are really and truly coming to me in spirit in such a moment, to seek me because you yearn for me as I do for

you, because my hand is knocking softly and insistently at the door of your heart, and you know that if you come in answer to it you will find mine open to receive you. You guest of a thousand welcomes! My own, own, dear love—I am all a-wait for you.

XVII

CHRISTMAS EVE.

MY OWN, MY OWN,—You who come at all hours of the day calling my name so that I know no rest for listening to your voice; I come this evening, because I know that up with you the tree will be lighted in all the homes, the Christmas fare will be spread and the tapers lighted, and all lonely souls will think with yearning of home and those they love. I know that your thoughts will be with me, and I feel you about me; you are drawing me to you, so that I feel every fibre in my body strain to go to you—to you who have stolen all that made me an independent entity.

England will remember this Yuletide as her "black Yule"; the whole nation is in mourning; men and women are heavy-eyed with the reading of the lists of dead and wounded. The shops have been gay, the windows crammed with

pretty things, but none the less Christmas here impresses one painfully; it is a period of gluttony, little else. A tiresome time when bills run up, and every one whose business 'tis to serve you lays wait for you with tip-expectant eye.

It is strange how little beauty there is here in the Christmas idea, how little poetry. There is none of the "home feeling" that makes it up with you, and partly in Germany and Holland, a time to be good and glad. That sense of the year time as a period of high festival, with something of mystic, sacred, holy in it is lacking.

In those countries I have sometimes felt as if the old legend was sweet and good to believe in; have felt as if the Christ-kind of a verity stole in unseen, and slipped a little clinging child-hand into one's palm and lisped of peace on earth, or made one conscious of the spark of the divine in all humanity—the real incarnation. I cannot think of the tiny God-man visiting the streets of London at Yuletide without a pang! I saw a tiny Jew boy, an exquisite laddie with glorious eyes and crisp curls and finely beaked nose, reading one of the placards at a street

corner—a tale of slaughter and misery! The whimsical idea came to me that if he were really that other little child, how the question would have to come home to him of the futility of his sacrifice. How he would be hustled if he were to lisp parables of peace and forgiveness; indeed, the least of his opponents would be the frankly pagan Hooligan, who would boot him as an "Iky"; how vain it would be for him to seek sanctuary in any of the pretentious edifices built in his honour, for their portals are closed for most of the hours of the day.

Your friend goes home, you tell me, so you will spend Christmas Eve alone. I wish I could drive up in a sleigh and knock at your door! How my heart would thump until you would come to the door, pipe in hand, and cry out with surprise, with a rush of joy in your eyes, and your voice as I have heard it so often, all broken with gladness. You would draw me in and we would laugh as we always do when we meet from sheer content—content and being together—and I could lure you out for a long drive through the dry clear air.

Do you remember one we had? We hardly spoke a word all the way; mile after mile in

silence, and yet our souls played "kiss hands" all the time. I felt your eyes dwell on my face, until it seemed to me you must know each line and curve by heart—and I wondered, wondered what you could find in it worth so much re-reading. A world of swansdown and diamond dust, sharp shadows and a divine quiet only broken by the bells playing a hundred melodies, a delight to ear and heart. And I snuggled so close to you that I could hear your heart beat with my body, not my ears! If only I could be with you; what a Yuletide we two would have! I have only sent you a few books: indeed, I had in intent a less niggardly gift, but a short cut I took through a poor district wiled the money for it out of my pocket to a better, I hope you will think, end.

I saw a big gaunt man of the "navvy" type leaning against a wall in a passage; his face was hidden on his folded arms, but his shoulders moved in a way to tell that a big man was crying like a child. I spoke to him, pulled him by the sleeve, persisted and made him talk. He had been in hospital for weeks, had come out to find his place filled up. He had got another and found he was too weak yet to lift weights.

The wife had a new baby, and there were two others. I said something about charities: if I had considered a moment I would have held my tongue. All our charity organisations are conducted with highly respectable narrowness. It turned out the wife (she isn't legally, in England) was his dead wife's sister, whom he had married, to use his own words, because "no one else would have as much 'eart for the nippers." She was, therefore, not up to the standard to obtain relief, as any trollop with marriage lines might be.

Heart's own, you know now where your gift went, and I know you would have smiled until your dear eyes would have been filled with light if you could have seen me with the navvy and the nippers. I went home with him; they had pawned almost everything. I had a most extraordinary afternoon; I even went with him to release the blankets. There was a poor thing trying to pawn a thin old wedding-ring, and I think, on the whole, I like best to think that the Christ-kind has ceased to come to London when the almanacks say it is his birthday.

Next year, heart's own, next year. Meanwhile I am with you, believe me, I am with you

in your lonely room; you will take me on to your knee, and I will tell over again for my own satisfaction the tale of your fascinating ugliness; confess to you all sorts of foolish dear things, throwing them out as a bait to lure the like from you. You who can set a chime, a peal of joy bells in my heart that tell not only of gladness, of content, of peace on earth—but of something else deeper, truer, holier, a little akin with the coming of God!

XVIII

MY DEAR, DEAR HUSBAND!—Best name in the world, for indeed it is as such I think of you, for have I not your ring on my hand? and it only remains to get back to you as quickly as may be, and then we can ratify legally that which we two feel we are now in our hearts. Your letter reached me this evening, your dear, dear letter! You should not have tried your strength and written at such length. My dear, my dear, you say so much that is great, so much that is tender in it, that I am all shaken with exceeding quiet delight

You say from this out "I will in truth be your husband, as you will in truth be my dear, dear wife." I will, with God's help! I have so little to write to you, it seems to me as if all has been said between us two. All doubts, all fears have vanished; all questions have been answered. Fate in the shape of sudden death

the only possible bar between us. It is late; I am tired; I have been packing, writing letters, tearing up papers, making all final arrangements the whole day; yet I cannot go to rest, for you are so with me, now that I am away from you again. I cannot banish you from my thoughts for one moment, am alternately elated with the wonderful joy of certainty, and tremulous with apprehensions that something might delay our meeting.

You reproach yourself in your letter for not having even asked me how I reached you so quickly, what kind of journey I had, whether I was tired or not. You say that, after I had gone from you again, you remembered how worn I looked, but that, when I was with you, you only saw the promise in my eyes, the smile about my mouth; felt a marvellous sense of rest and peace enfold you like a falling into sleep in snow—but when I had really, really gone, it came home to you that you had been selfish; and the tears came to your eyes, and you reproached yourself so bitterly; wished me back, so that you might prove to me that you were not really careless of me, not merely selfish; only that my being with you at all seemed so

wonderful that it drove every thought away, lulled you into a kind of waking dream of serenest gladness.

You tell me that you will make up to me for it, you will live only for my happiness, my welfare, to compass that is the end and aim of your existence. Your eyes, dear heart, told me all that already. You say that you have knelt every night since and prayed God that we two may walk together in His sight in the ways of righteousness, and not be separated at the end; that I have made you sacred to yourself, that your poor room is hallowed by the memory of my presence; that you see my eyes smiling at you when you close yours to sleep, and feel me near you; that you wake with a cry, and stretch out your arms to enfold me, and shiver with fear as you realise I am no longer there—but that then the new blessed sense of security awakes in you, and you whisper to yourself, "She is my promised wife; she will come back. It is only for a little while!"

And then you grow calm, and lie quietly until the thought of me glows in you to tenderness. That is better, love! I cannot write any more of my own feelings now; they lie too

deep to be voiced in a letter; they have become holy to me; I only know I am the happiest woman in the whole world.

You go back again and again to the fact of my writing so that you got your little wife's letter a few hours after she had left you. You speak of it with the *naïve* wonder of a child. You call me the sweetest, dearest, most wonderful woman in the world for thinking of that. You ask me when I contrived to write it. Dear, you remember I coaxed you to sleep, and sat with your hand in mine the evening before I left. Well, I loosened it ever so gently, and tucked it under the rug, and then I wrote my letter kneeling next your bed; for I knew that if I posted it late that night it would come to you in the hour of your trouble at my loss.

How could you think I would leave you that first day without some consolation, without coming back to you in some form or another? You tell me it was the most wonderful letter in the world; that when they put it into your hand, the shock of seeing my writing almost made you faint, for your misery at my going was so intense that you were beside yourself. That the words in it are pure gold; that they warmed

you, thrilled you, made you so exultantly glad that you felt yourself a god amongst men.

Poor dear! I forget what I did write; I only know it was the first letter I wrote to the man I looked upon as my husband, and I tried to tell you what my idea of a wife meant. You say you could hear me speaking the words, feel my breath on your cheek as you read them; feel me come to you with the quick, silent movements you say I have—actually feel me near. And you tell me that you want to kneel and kiss my feet, my hands, to clasp your arms round my waist, and lay your head against me, and tell me as you have never told me of the depth of your entire devotion and your gratitude, your love for me. My own dear love, I could not have you kneel to me; no, little husband! never that again!

You ask me to tell you how I got to you! Well, when no answer came to my letter, I wired; then I wired again and prepaid the reply. Your friend answered, "Ill." The moment I read that my mind was made up. As always when the real crisis comes I lose my nervousness, my restlessness, and a great calm seizes me, I see clearly and can act promptly; I

packed my bag, took some heavy rugs, and in two hours I was on my way to London.

I knew that I should be too late for the bank, so I drove straight to Attenborough's (the best representative of our English *mont de pieté*) and left a diamond pendant as security for a little pile of English sovereigns, and caught the night mail to Queensborough. We had a roughish passage, but I sat at the top of the companion-way and let the cold breeze sting me; I was too nervously strung, I fancy, to feel sick; I have noticed that before. I seemed to be unconscious of the existence of my body; I was at one end of a quivering thread of light and you were at the other. I can't explain this, but so I felt it to be, and my name vibrated along it all night in every accent of imploring longing and weary reiteration. It maddened me almost. I cannot recall the journey; I know Hamburg so well that perhaps the very familiarity of the stations made me not notice them. The hours seemed days; my knowledge was so vague, I pictured you unconscious, dead; every terrible possibility cropped up.

The trains seemed to crawl; the mad idea came that one could get out, really get out and

shove behind, they made so little advance. The only moments of relief I experienced were those in which I drove from one station to another or to the steamers; I seemed at least then to be doing something.

I remember nothing of Copenhagen, nothing of the journey to Stockholm; I could not eat, I could not rest, I paced up and down the corridor of the sleeper until the little attendant persuaded me to have some coffee with cognac, and I fell asleep. I can recall distinctly the face of a porter with a blue blouse and sabots at Flushing; but as a whole the journey is a phantasmagoria of trains, gangways, great waiting-rooms, twinkling lights on water, and flat roads drawn with geometrical precision. Even when I snatched an hour's sleep, I fancied I could hear the train thump a mocking "Don't you come too late, don't you come too late," until it seemed to me I was like a hollow gourd and the soul of me was crouched up, a tiny thing holding on in suspense inside myself.

At Helsingfors the strain slackened a little; the half unfamiliar Swedish and the wholly strange Finnish of some men on the platform worried me; I went boldly up to a big, well-

dressed man and rattled out: "Do you speak English, French, German, or Norwegian, sir?" as if I were demanding, "Your purse or your life!" I can never forget his courtesy. He wrote down the name of the station, and "I want to be driven to S." on a card for me. He looked somewhat curious; I suppose I was rather a wreck. It was bitterly cold: you see I had left the spring behind me to come upon your winter in its death-rattle.

The two hours dragged interminably; at any other time the Bible on the waiting-room table might have interested me. There is a fascination about the first chapter of Genesis in other tongues, although, for modern purposes, to learn a language that way has its drawbacks; I met a quaint German priest once in Rhineland who used to say the most appalling things in Biblical English.

As the train left, that dear man turned up again; he told me he had wired to the station-master to get me a conveyance, as I might after all have a difficulty in making myself understood, and it would be dusk when I arrived. I don't remember even noticing the country or the people, simply sat in dumb misery, until I read

the name of the station, then I could have screamed from sheer relief. The station-master came forward, put his heels together, saluted, and took me to an odd sort of phaeton-like conveyance still on runners.

I have a vague impression of flat country, then a big wooden building, and straight desolate-looking streets with dim lights and square, ugly houses. We pulled up with a jerk, and the man carried my bag into the entry, touched his mangy fur cap, and rattled off over the cobble stones. I mounted the wide wooden stairs; they gave me an impression of desolate discomfort, for there were the footmarks of many feet and bits of half-dried mud and snow; a peal of laughter and voices with the tinkle of a piano sounded from behind the glass-panelled doors of the first flat. I read the name on the china door-plate, and went up again; at the turn of the next landing I ran against a tall blue-eyed man with, it struck me at once, the most astonishingly big fair moustache I had ever seen. He raised his hat, apologised, started, looked at me again and cried in French—"Ah! Mademoiselle has really come, thank God!" I don't think I said anything; we went up

another flight, and he left me in an untidy, dreadful sitting-room. My own photograph stared at me amongst the litter of papers on your table; I heard you give a cry and I could wait no longer; I opened the door and rushed in.

You poor thing! how you looked! what a man, what a room! But nothing in the whole world mattered; I had you, I could feel you, see you, your hollow eyes stared pitifully out of a gaunt, unshaven face; there was an extraordinary joy blazing in them! I could smooth my hand over your dear hot head, and when you let me take off my coat and lay aside my hat so that I could kneel next your bed and gather you close to me, and croon over you to my heart's content; I registered a vow that never again would I let you go! I suppose Bacher came in; some one did; I heard the door closed gently, and my bag was there when I looked round. Afterwards when I said: "Let me go, dear, for a little, my feet are cold and my boots are heavy!" you looked worried as if you did not yet quite realise what it meant.

I can see it all over again. I sat on the chair near you and took off my boots, and you lay

with both your hands' palms together under your cheek, it is a trick of yours, and watched me; and when I got out my slippers and put them on (it was quaint of you to make me leave them behind, and it touched me when you said it was because they were such witnesses to the wonderful fact of my having actually been with you), I saw the tears running down your cheeks.

You told me afterwards that there was something so intimate, so convincing, such a guarantee of what was to come, in the quiet way I set my boots aside, and drew on the little blue felt slippers. The very fact of their not being new, just those I had worn at home with myself, touched you as nothing had ever done before, and you could not help yourself. Extraordinary person, that little doctor! what a head! like a plush ball! And his comical genuflections! I made him tell me all I wanted to know: you were over the worst, only weak, in need of nursing, nourishment, cheering up.

If the journey is blurred, not one detail of that wonderful ten days will ever fade in my memory. How contented you were to let me take complete possession of you. Just to lie

still and watch me make a wholesale clearance of all the litter outside the door. How you submitted to washing, and coloured like a little shy girl because I searched through the chaos of your chest of drawers for a clean nightshirt. Friedrich Augustus Bacher's face was a still greater study, when, having aired it on that hideously unhealthy coil of hot-water pipes in the corner, I took it to him; and told him to put it on whilst I tried to set things straight in the outer room.

Happiness is the greatest beautifier. You looked quite a comely boy when I went back. Friedrich Augustus was certainly the most devoted of couriers, for when you dropped asleep we discussed ways and means; he never told me he had been up a week. I decided to curl up on the big sofa and use his room otherwise. He looked entirely bewildered at my desire for a bath, and it ended in buying a butter tub. Then he went to the little hotel for eatables, and when you woke the lamp was lit and your bouillon was waiting, and my tea was ready to be brewed and there was a pot of crocuses and lily of the valley on the table; and it is good, just good to transgress all the con-

ventions, to see for one day in a life that look of supreme happiness on the face of the man one loves.

You grew feverish later and a little light-headed, and when you had your sleeping draught I put on my dressing-gown and knelt beside you and smoothed your head until you slept. You were holding my hand as in a vice, and I was so tired: my four weary days and nights' wide-eyed suspense and strain were telling on me, and I dropped asleep in spite of myself. I half felt some one lift me up gently, and lay me next you and tuck my feet up, and cover me with a rug, but I was too exhausted to worry, and after all what did it matter?

It was the same good Friedrich Augustus who came with the coffee when the morning was stealing in, and unfamiliar sounds came up from the street below. I had just roused to find that you were wide awake, and had slipped your arm under me and drawn my head close to you; you only said simply: "Good morning, my dear wife, I am feeling so well, and it is all so good and wonderful, I have been saying the Our Father." And when I sat up my hair was about my ears, and you cried that they were

fearsome weapons I kept it up with; might stick in one's ears as one slept; that you had pulled out every one you could find without waking me.

How we laughed and how good that coffee was!—the best I ever tasted. What splendid days followed and how we laughed together—the feast we had when you got up first! To be real happy is to treat life as an adventure, each day a fresh one, just never to grow up to make a fairy tale of it, and above all never to be afraid of the ogres. The ogres of adverse circumstances or the unexpected trick of fate! Grin at them, hold on doggedly to your end of the see-saw; suppose they do keep you down for a while, if you only sit tight enough you will out-tire them, and your end of the plank is bound to go up; then the laugh is on your side! It's still more on your side if you can see something humorous in your situation when you're down, if you can get a satisfaction out of your own power of endurance. There's a lack of humour in most of the dispensations of Providence: if you can supply the deficiency in yourself, you're just stronger than all the ogres of life.

What a pair we will be when we make common cause together! How good it was to give and take! I loved every little housewifely thing I did for you; and the best of it all was that it was voluntarily, no duty, no obligation, just service for love's sake. What a fine fellow Friedrich Augustus is; how gratified he was because I asked him to go with me to buy our betrothal rings. Do you remember when we exchanged them, and we both thanked him for his goodness, and I said that I hoped in all the future he would be *our* friend as he had been yours! and then when I asked you "May I?" and your eyes gave consent, and I stretched up on my toes and held up my face, he kissed me as solemnly as if he were performing some religious rite. Big, simple, good man!

Good-night, dear, dear husband! do not be anxious, to-morrow will find me in London, and I shall put the work of two days into one. Take care of yourself, you dearest of all things in the world, get strong and well and be happy! Believe that every second I live is only of moment because it brings me nearer to you, is an effort of will to that end, that best and only end. My dearest, my best beloved! You

holder of my heart and destiny, you keeper of the key to my house of life! I creep up next you as I did before, and you will gather me close to you and hold my head to you, and we will kiss one another good-night and say our prayers and go to sleep.—Your R. A.

XIX

LONDON.

MY HEART'S OWN, MY VERY OTHER ME,—I can only write a little. I have had a cab by the hour all day, and I have done wonders, have bought everything I shall need for the long journey later on. I have seen my faithful man-of-law, and by sheer strength of the wonderful happiness and faith which is making a thing of flame and steel of me just now, I forced him against all his convictions, in opposition to all the habits of his business life, to fall in with my views. I simply swept his sedate professional manner to the winds, coaxed, persuaded, and dominated him all in one breath. The money is forthcoming, things are all, all arranged, *my* way too, not his.

I could not sit still, I walked about, the swish of my gown fidgeted him; finally I sat on the corner of the table with the letter-press; I

could see out; the sparrows were chattering and building on the roof. He wanted to cross-examine me, to know all about your prospects, your position, when I had decided upon this momentous step, when I had seen you? I felt like a mischievous little girl when he said, "Is it not rather sudden? Three weeks ago when you were here you did not mention it." "No," said I, "it was not arranged then; but I don't think it's at all sudden, my inward conviction is that it has been settled from the beginning of time!"

He waived that explanation aside, suggested that to conclude a matter of such importance by letter was scarcely wise; I ought surely to see this gentleman, make quite sure, wherever he is. "Vlapostock," said I. It was the first name that came into my head, and he wouldn't have been any the wiser had I said S——. "It is rather far north," I added; "I have just been there." "In the last three weeks?" I think he doubted my word. "Yes; I spent ten days there."

I was getting impatient; spring was in the air, and in every breath of the spring I could hear you calling, calling insistently until my blood echoed in response. Outside in the grey

courtyard the soot-black tree trunks were speckled with the most exquisite tender green leaflets, bursting into florescence on the still bare branches. A laburnum tree about to blossom was covered with little clumps, like tiny bunches of grey-green nails with a dot of yellow in each; two clouds were chasing one another across the rarely seen blue of a London sky. I followed a mad impulse: I asked him quite suddenly if he had ever been in love himself. When I show you his photograph, the audacity of so personal a question to an Englishman of his type will come home to you.

In all the games of life it is always the most unlikely card which will give you the odd trick. "If you ever were," I added, "you'll know how entirely useless all your arguments are. For if you could prove logically, conclusively, and infallibly to me that I am going to be very miserable a year from now because of this great, glad, good, glorious feeling I have in me to-day, it would not alter my determination one atom! I would just open my arms wide and cry joyously, triumphantly, 'Give me to-day!'"

He has odd, hard blue eyes, and I had never seen any emotion in them in all the years I have

known him; none the less upon whatever of heart there is underneath that cold exterior, some woman has written her autograph. I was almost sorry when I saw the effect of my remark, and I looked out through the window to give him time to be himself again.

He came round and put his hand on my shoulder and said: "You are the most eccentric woman, always have been, I have ever known; I have opened the letters I have received from you—my nephew has a very fair collection of the stamps of the world cut off your envelopes—with a sense of expectancy, curiosity as to your latest development. I have always conducted your business myself because of the very extraordinary things you have chosen to do with your money at times. Indeed, the still more singular persons you have occasionally sent to this office made it a necessity, in order to keep a due decorum on the part of my clerks. I may tell you, now that I shall probably see less of you, that you have been a very bright experience in a somewhat routinous life. I read a novel or two on my summer holiday when the weather keeps me from fishing; I have regarded your visits and your communi-

cations to me somewhat in the same light. You have reminded me too, in odd moments, in your waywardness, of a lady I knew many years ago; so that I have a personal feeling beyond the interest one takes in a client!"

Smooth sailing after that, dear! All the office work was set aside, the clerks had to fly, I stayed there three hours, made a fresh will; I am to sign it at the Consulate in my new name. He sent out for lunch for me, got me a little super-excellent champagne and some exquisite fruit; said I looked pale when the need for action had worn off. There is not anything in this world much pleasanter than the unexpected discovery of a vein of tender human nature; with the desire to love and be loved, and the softness that the memory of a past love gives, underneath a cold matter-of-fact exterior.

I finished my visit appropriately, for when I was leaving and he wished me all luck I put up my face and kissed him—I wonder do you mind? Why should you? You, who own every fibre of me, whom my soul is panting to reach, so that living is in a way a pain, what with the call of the spring and the straining heart-beats in myself. I have only to see the

export agents to-morrow to arrange for the transport of the heavy cases.

I am very tired, but very, very happy, I want to be good to all the world! I don't believe in the chastening hand of sorrow. Some soured old prophet sowed the seed of that fallacy. Joy, love, laughter, chasten best the heart to goodness, to tenderness, to divinest pity! Sorrow is a hell-cat brewing bitter broth to give the whole world indigestion!

I saw three little lads outside a big shop in Holborn; one was howling bitterly; I stopped the hansom. There is something touching about little lads, I never care half so well for little maids. There is a quaint pathetic look about their little breeches and coats, they fit so badly, which always makes me laugh, I can never resist them. Besides, as a rule laddies' eyes meet one frankly without the consciousness or the criticism one sees in a girl. "What is he crying for?" I asked. The weazen-faced kiddie with old wise eyes answered, pointing to number three: "'E fritted" (frightened for your elucidation) "'im! 'E's allus a doing it!" *'E* grinned. He had a curly head and a comical long lip, and said with a touch of brogue: "Sure,

lady, I was only playin'!" "It's dangerous," commented No. 1 severely, "to fritten 'im; 'e might get 'vulsions, I've 'ad 'em!" I felt a tug at some new fibre inside me, which I have been unconscious of until lately; I think all my life my serene detachment has been the best thing I owned—it was the secret of all my gay, bright outlook, my self-sufficiency, undaunted fearlessness. Now I am bankrupt in all that, in all that made a solitary life pleasantly possible! You hold a mortgage deed on my whole self—were you to foreclose, heart's own, then indeed I should be a beggar—for this bankruptcy admits of no settlement with one's creditors. I took them in and they chose khaki hats, swords, sabretaches, a brass cannon and a drum. The shop girl and I equipped them, and they departed, with pennies in their pockets, and I hope a temporary gladness in their child hearts. No. 1 said his uncle was fightin' ole Kroojer, but London children of that class say no "Thank yous." They are born gamblers, accepting everything that comes, ill or good, with a "just my luck" philosophy!

The last I saw of them was at the turnstile. Pat was leading a reckless charge to the dis-

comfiture of two portly old gentlemen on the pavement, and I've no doubt it is a case of Boer and Briton down their alley-way. My cabby's smile made me think he had small Tommies of his own somewhere. Mind, love! underneath all this nonsense I am writing to you, because tired or not I must, must, must be with you; there is one great central feeling of love, love, love and perfect contented happiness.

This will be my last letter, dearest, as I will wire from stages on the route—the beginning of the best journey in the world, the journey to you, to journey with you for the rest, with God's will, of our time.

Thank you, my own dear love, for every hour since I have known you. Thank you for every tender word you have written, every dear name you have ever coined for me; for every hour of fuller life, for every sharpened sense, every brighter dream I have had since we two found one another. Thank you above all for teaching me through the love you have given me, and called into flame in me, to find myself and the best thing for me as a woman in all the world—the merging of myself and my fate into that of the man it is my glory to love.

ROSA AMOROSA

In good or bad days, in gladness or sorrow, in every and any fate, with God's help, unselfishly, and in any case, always lovingly, tenderly, faithfully, your friend, your sweetheart, your wife.—R. A.

XX

EARLY this year she wrote to me a letter, which she sent to me with a curiously carved box holding their letters. She said:

DEAR OLD FRIEND, NICE WOMAN THING!—You who hold a mortgage on my friendship, and to whom I go often in the way of fond thought, I send you these. You ask me of myself; it is difficult for me to write, for I am fearsome of talking of my delight, being as a child who will draw in its breath and fold its little hands with awe at the revelation of some new wonder—and says no words. The wonder of the spring here in the North is as the marvel and enchantment or my own happiness, a thing to be read in the eyes, to be felt in the heart—poor words can give no realisation of it! God can give me no better in this life than I have.

My intense well-being has made me curiously

humble-hearted, reverent as it were, in the face of the great good which has come to me. My heart is all curd-soft in me. Love has laid the key-stone to an edifice of understanding sympathy in me big enough to embrace all the woes of humanity. I want to take all the suffering souls in the world in my arms to comfort. Love that narrows, hardens, or is a mere incarnation of the flesh without birth of spirit as well, cannot be love.

There is a magic music somewhere in myself that has a silver whisper in its melody. I find my whole being tuned to its harmony. As one is unconscious of one's body in perfect well-being, I seem to feel no duty irksome; I cannot feel my feet under me; the commonest things of living are a delight. And the marvellous, wonderful, never to be explained mystery is that I know *he* feels as I do—that all day long our souls echo the love whisper in one another's hearts. We sit for hours quietly; often I look up and answer an unspoken question, one he has only just thought to put, but not had time to clothe in words. At such moments we feel a kind of awe of this strange bond which makes two egoists, as we both are, one.

ROSA AMOROSA

If I were to call to your memory all that is most exquisite, most tender, most loveworthy in this great, good, glad world of ours—the snow-wreaths of the cherry, the blushing, dripping bloom of gnarled old apple-trees in some orchard croft, where the primroses lurk and the speed-well peer through the grass on some perfect day in England; or Rio bay in a flood of moonlight on a warm night, when the witch moon weaves a magic more insistent in its seductive enchant-ment than in our colder regions; so that the whisper in the air of the tropical night searches in and tells of the first beginnings of love un-chastened by any ideal; remind you of that never-to-be-forgotten face you and I once saw smiling down to us out of the blackened canvas in that quaint out-of-the-way chapel—wonderful face, which spoke to us through the fine proud lips with their tender curves, telling us of the dream-children unborn in us, stirring all that was best in us both, and sent us out into the sordid world again with a fresh vow of fine womanhood in our life's intention; ay, call to mind all that we two, unlike as we are, have found together of beauty and truth—I would only be striking one note of the perfect

whole which is making of life a God-given harmony!

How words spoken lightly often work to certain issue! I can recall something I once said to you about my letters. Yesterday I told him of it. We who always have the same thought, to whom the soul and mind and heart of each other is an open book, came without words to the same conclusion and so I send you our letters. I have a feeling, it is not exactly a foreboding, not a shadow, for there *can* be nothing of shadow for *one* of us, for I have an absolute inviolable belief that the future can bring no existence for *one* of us—*apart* from the other—I cannot explain this, but it carries conviction, and with it comfort, to me, and *he* has the same faith. The feeling I have is of another kind, a kind of foresight, as it were, of something to come to us both.

We leave for China next week: he has an appointment as Interpreter and Commercial Agent in connection with the Lu Han Railway. He heard from a Russian friend of the likelihood of trouble. I have no fear. I send you the little gold coin I have always worn as a luck-bringer. I have found my luck—may it bring

you a tithe even of the gladness that has come to me as my portion. You say that the world is less good to live in because I am going to the "back of God's speed" so that I cannot pop my "bright, birdlike head" (nice thing!) unexpectedly through your door, and that you will miss the look in my "elfin eyes alight with some white fire in myself."

You dear old George! I gave him your undecipherable scrawl and he spelled it through; he takes a strange pleasure in reading all the tender, good things you write to me.

You tell me the tears—yes, I know they come rarely to you—fill your eyes when you think of me, that you dread hours of discouragement when you will want to draw on the "treasury of my heart."

Dear, dear woman, if such moments come, think insistently of me. Believe me, I shall come from whichever world I may be in, and I will whisper of love and trust and true friendship, things untouched by mortality, that live ever. Love the begetter of love, the immortal God of all time.

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yours truly

Louis & Louise